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THE HYPOCRITES

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES



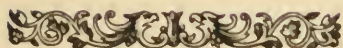
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THE HYPOCRITES





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THE HYPOCRITES

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

“ Expediency is man's wisdom : doing right is God's.”
THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP.

LONDON

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PERSONS REPRESENTED.

SIR JOHN PLUGENET, BART , of Plugenet Court.

MR. WILMORE, lord of the Manor of Weybury.

LENNARD WILMORE, his son.

MR. VIVEASH, Lawyer and Estate Agent.

THE REVEREND EVERARD DAUBENY, Vicar of Weybury.

DR. BLANEY.

THE REVEREND EDGAR LINNELL, Curate of Weybury.

GOODVER.

MRS. WILMORE.

HELEN PLUGENET.

MRS. LINNELL.

MRS. BLANEY.

RACHEL NEVE.

PATTY, servant at the Linnells.

ACT I.

SCENE.—MRS. WILMORE'S BOUDOIR AT THE MANOR HOUSE, WEYBURY.

Time—AN AFTERNOON IN OCTOBER.

ACT II.

SCENE.—LIVING-ROOM AT EDGAR LINNELL'S.

Time—TWO HOURS LATER ON THE SAME EVENING.

ACT III.

SCENE.—LIBRARY AT THE MANOR HOUSE.

Time—MORNING, TEN DAYS LATER.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—THE SAME.

Time—AFTERNOON, A FORTNIGHT LATER.



ACT I.

SCENE: MRS. WILMORE'S *boudoir*, the *Manor House*, *Weybury*, a bright pretty room in an old English country house. A door at back, centre. A large sofa left of the door at back. A large bow window opening out upon garden up left. A cottage piano with revolving music-stool down left, below window. A door up right. A fireplace down right, with a fire burning. A comfortable armchair above the fireplace. A table with chairs right centre.

TIME: *About four on an autumn afternoon.*

Discover MRS. WILMORE seated at table talking to MRS. LINNELL, who is standing near. MRS. WILMORE is a charming English lady of forty-five, well-bred, well-dressed, still attractive in face and figure, with easy, pleasant, winning manners. MRS. LINNELL is a bright, pretty, ordinary little lady, very tidily, but very cheaply dressed.

Mrs. Wilmore.



MRS. WILMORE is much annoyed by Mr. Linnell's conduct——

Mrs. L. I'm very sorry——

Mrs. W. My dear, your husband has been curate of Weybury for just a year. During that

time we've had nothing but constant little upsets in the parish.

Mrs. L. There were so many things to be reformed.

Mrs. W. Of course there were! And we quite appreciate Mr. Linnell's zeal and courage in reforming them. But he makes us all thoroughly uncomfortable!

Mrs. L. How?

Mrs. W. We never know whose turn to be reformed may come next. And we all know we need it!

Mrs. L. Edgar has only done what he thought right.

Mrs. W. I dare say. But you have two little children, and your income is——

Mrs. L. A hundred and twenty a year.

Mrs. W. A man can't afford extravagant notions of right and wrong on a hundred and twenty a year. Go home and persuade your husband to drop all this unnecessary reforming. It's altogether too expensive a luxury for a man in his position.

Mrs. L. I'll tell him what you say.

Mrs. W. And one little hint. Now that Mr. Daubeny is appointed Dean of Gilminster, Mr. Wilmore, as lord of the Manor, has the presentation to the living here——

Mrs. L. Oh, Mrs. Wilmore——!

Enter GOODYER, the butler, at back.

Goodyer. [Announcing.] Mr. Viveash.

Enter MR. VIVEASH, a shrewd, genial man of fifty, clever, alert, plausible, cynical, but with an air of bonhomie. In manners, dress and culture, he is much above the ordinary, country lawyer.

Vive. [Coming cordially to MRS. WILMORE.] How d'ye do?

Mrs. W. How d'ye do? [Shaking hands.] The door, Goodyer.

[GOODYER waits in the passage at back.]

Vive. [*To MRS. LINNELL.*] How d'ye do?
[*Shaking hands.*]

Mrs. L. How d'ye do?

Vive. How's Linnell? What fresh mischief is he up to?

Mrs. L. Mischief?

Vive. If he raises the pitch just half a note higher, he'll make the old place simply uninhabitable for a comfortable hardened old sinner like me.

Mrs. W. [*To MRS. LINNELL.*] Do you hear that?

Mrs. L. Yes.

Mrs. W. Good-bye, dear! [*Shaking hands.*]

[*Exit MRS. LINNELL, door at back.* GOOD-YER, *who has waited, closes it behind her.* VIVEASH goes up very cordially to MRS. WILMORE. *His manner to her throughout is more that of an old friend than of a lawyer.*]

Vive. Any news from Sir John?

Mrs. W. Yes, a cable from Suez. He'll be home next week, and as he must return to India before Christmas, Lennard and Helen are to be married almost at once.

Vive. Good. I don't like long engagements. What about the name?

Mrs. W. Sir John insists that Lennard shall take the name of Plugenet on his marriage.

Vive. Well, considering how handsomely he has behaved over the settlements, that's not much!

Mrs. W. No, but my boy is my boy, my only one, and to give up his father's name—however, as there's plenty of money, we may manage to get the old peerage revived.

Vive. I'm sure you will. I'm sure you can manage anything, after watching the superb way you've managed this marriage!

Mrs. W. It didn't need any managing. When Sir John had to go to India, he was obliged to leave Helen in somebody's care. I was a very old friend, and——

Vive. He couldn't have left her in better hands.

Mrs. W. Lennard was away in the Highlands making that railway. When he came back, what more natural than that Helen and he should fall in love with each other?

Vive. Very natural, very right, very satisfactory. All the same, I take off my hat to you!

Mrs. W. You think I'm a scheming, match-making mother——

Vive. Every good mother must be scheming and match-making.

Mrs. W. At any rate I've not acted meanly or selfishly. I've done it all for Len.

Vive. I'm sure you have. And I do take off my hat to you.

Mrs. W. It has turned out fortunately. When I remember that six months ago we were paupers, with all our land heavily mortgaged, and Lennard was a struggling engineer, with a few hundreds a year, and no prospects—and now!

Vive. Yes, it's a brilliant change of scene for all of us. I had terrible trouble to renew the mortgages.

Mrs. W. I'm sure you had.

Vive. I had to come into it with my bit of property——

Mrs. W. It was good of you.

Vive. By the way, Markdale is agent for the Plugenet estate. He's very old. When he drops off you might put in a good word for me to Sir John.

Mrs. W. My dear old friend, I'm sure I can manage that.

Vive. I'm sure you can.

[*They shake hands cordially.*]

Enter right HELEN PLUGENET and LENNARD WILMORE. She is a tall, delicate, refined girl of about twenty, dreamy, spirituelle, unusual. LENNARD is an ordinary, handsome young Englishman about twenty-five. They are in outdoor clothes.

Vive. How d'ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*]

Hel. How d'ye do?

Vive. How are you, Lennard?

[*Nodding to LENNARD.*]

Len. How are you?

Vive. Now, when you two can spare me half an hour——

Hel. About the settlements?

Vive. Yes——

Hel. Everything is to be just as Lennard wishes. Only please put in a clause that the little garden in the corner of my soul is to be my own—always my very own freehold.

Vive. I must leave the corners of your soul to Daubeney.

Hel. Oh, please don't!

Vive. Well then, to Linnell.

Hel. At least, Mr. Linnell is sincere.

Vive. Yes, confound him! That's what makes him such a terrible nuisance.

Hel. Now I know why Mr. Linnell is so much disliked.

Mrs. W. Helen, I hope you've reconsidered the question of the marriage——

Hel. No, dear. The quietest, simplest wedding at our own little church, and only Mr. Linnell to marry us.

Mrs. W. Why Mr. Linnell?

Hel. Because he's just a plain, ordinary curate, and I like him.

Mrs. W. You haven't spoken to him?

Hel. Yes, last night. He has promised to marry us. [MRS. WILMORE shows great disappointment.] Dear, you mustn't be angry with me. [*Kissing her.*] My marriage is the greatest event in all history, and you must let me have my own wilful way.

Mrs. W. Of course, dear, but I hoped——

Hel. For a big, fashionable wedding in London. Then all my lilies would have withered!

Mrs. W. What lilies?

Hel. The lilies I've been trying to grow in my own little garden.

Len. I must take a look round that garden.

Hel. No, Len, not at present. You'd only tread on the flower-beds. [*Looking out of window.*] We must make haste if we are to get to the wish-tower for the sunset. [*Going off at window.*] Are you coming?

[*Exit at window.*]

Len. [*Going after her.*] I wish I was a better fellow, for her sake!

Mrs. W. Len, that's unworthy of you! You won't do anything now to break off the marriage?

Len. No, of course not. I love her too much, but—she is too good for me.

Mrs. W. [*Kissing him.*] There isn't any girl in England who's good enough for my boy.

[*Kissing him fondly. Exit LENNARD at window.*]

Mrs. W. [*Standing at window, looking after him.*] What mother wouldn't be proud of him!

Vive. Well, we shall have no further trouble with him when he's once married.

Mrs. W. Lennard never has given us any real trouble.

Vive. Hum——

Mrs. W. Not more than any handsome, high-spirited boy naturally gives to his parents, eh?

Vive. No—no, about the average.

Mrs. W. Well, it's all over now.

Vive. Yes, all over. And we've only to shake hands, and congratulate ourselves that our little comedy will have such a happy ending—wedding bells—interior of the village church—shouts—dancing on the village green—curtain!

Mrs. W. Yes, when Lennard and Helen stand at the altar next month, I shall feel I've reaped the harvest of my life. I shall have nothing to do but to rest and be happy.

Vive. Not you! You'll be working night and day to get that peerage for Lennard.

Mrs. W. You shrivel me up with your cynicism!

Enter GOODYER at back, showing in the REVEREND EVERARD DAUBENY, a fat, rosy vicar of sixty, purring, placid, time-serving, self-indulgent. GOODYER announces "Mr. Daubeny." DAUBENY enters, and GOODYER exit.

Daub. [To MRS. WILMORE.] How d' ye do, my dear friend?

Mrs. W. How are you? [Shaking hands.]

Daub. Ah, Viveash!

Vive. How are you? [Shaking hands.]

Mrs. W. Mr. Viveash is scoffing, as usual. Scold him well.

Daub. Fie! Fie! Ah, you may scoff, Viveash, but whether we believe our religion, or whether we don't; whether it's true or whether it isn't, you can't deny that it's the linch-pin of society; and once take away the linch-pin—by the way, Mrs. Wilmore, your cook never sent me the receipt for those heavenly devilled quails—what did you call them?

Mrs. W. Quails Estelle!

Daub. Quails Estelle! My dear wife was so enchanted with them. We thought they would make such an excellent *entree* for our first dinner party at the deanery.

Mrs. W. When do you leave Weybury?

Daub. In about a fortnight. Talking of my leaving, has Wilmore settled the presentation of the living here?

Mrs. W. We half promised it to Mr. Linnell.

Daub. Surely a half promise isn't binding. I tremble to think of my poor parish in the hands of that headstrong, misguided young man!

Enter MR. WILMORE at back, in shooting costume. He is a stout, violent, shallow, hot-tempered, illogical, English country gentleman, stuffed with

all the prejudices of his class. He appears hastily and angrily at door at back, where he is seen giving his gun to GOODYER.

Wil. And, Goodyer, send over to Mr. Linnell, and tell him I wish him to see me here at once. [*Enters and closes door after him.*] Ah, how do, Viveash? [*Shakes hands with VIVEASH.*] Daubeney, how are you? Upon my word, things have come to a pretty pass!

Daub. I fear our friend Linnell has been injudicious again!

Wil. Injudicious! If you please, "The Blue Lion" is to be pulled down and turned into a model public-house and working-man's social recreation club! And our precious Mr. Linnell is the ringleader of the scheme!

Mrs. W. "The Blue Lion" has always been a dreadful, drunken, disreputable place! Why not turn it into a model public house?

Wil. Because Pelly wants it for one of his brewery houses. Naturally a big brewer like Pelly doesn't wish to have model public-houses dumped down everywhere in his own district. It would ruin his brewery. He has given me plainly to understand that if I don't put the stopper on Linnell, he'll take care Lennard shan't put up for the Gilminster division. What do you think of that, Viveash?

Vive. It's hopeless for Lennard to stand for Gilminster without Pelly's support.

Wil. There you are! Pretty position for a man of my standing! My son can't serve his country in Parliament because my curate—well, not precisely my curate, but, say, our curate—chooses to run amuck against an influential brewer, and sound churchman, like Pelly!

Enter GOODYER, at back, showing in MRS. BLANEY, a country doctor's wife, about forty-five; a moral ambiguous woman, soured by childlessness; formal

ill-natur'd, with an air of melancholy resignation; dressed in a marked provincial style; quite provincial and middle-class in tone, manner and thought.
 GOODYER announces, "Mrs. Blaney."

[Exit GOODYER.]

Mrs. W. How d'ye do?

Mrs. B. How are you? [*Shaking hands.*] How d'ye do, Mr. Wilmore? [*Shaking hands.*] Mr. Viveash! Oh, Mr. Daubeny, I went over to the vicarage, and they told me you were here.

[*Shaking hands with* DAUBENY.]

Daub. I hope nothing serious has happened?

Mrs. B. Yes. At least, it happened three weeks ago.

Daub. What?

Mrs. B. Sarah Piper.

Daub. Ah, yes! Ah, yes! Most unhappy girl!

Vive. I'm told it's a remarkably fine child.

Mrs. B. Yes, unfortunately. And why children should be allotted to a hussy like that, while those whose conduct and respectability might surely entitle them to some consideration from Providence——

Daub. Ah, yes! It's most inscrutable!

Vive. But three weeks—Sarah Piper hasn't already made a fresh contribution to——

Mrs. B. Yes. She has confessed who is—a—responsible.

Wil. Who is the scoundrel?

Mrs. B. I'm sorry to say he is a tenant of yours.

Wil. No! After the example I made of Peter Rawlins last year, surely no tenant of mine would dare to—No!

Mrs. W. Who is it, Mrs. Blaney?

Mrs. B. William Sheldrake.

Mrs. W. I'm very sorry.

Mrs. B. Yes. Such a quiet, respectable young man. Always took off his hat with such a pleasant, modest smile. Oh, Mr. Daubeny, how is it that so many respectable people——?

Daub. Very true! There does seem to be a far greater proportion than one would have supposed—it is truly appalling!

[His hands on his fat stomach, tapping it with his fat fingers.]

Mrs. B. I often look round and ask myself, “Who is to be trusted?”

Daub. Who indeed? Who indeed?

Mrs. B. And I answer, “Nobody.”

Daub. Oh, come! come! Isn’t that just a little too severe?

Mrs. B. One cannot be too severe. As I was saying to Mr. Linnell about William Sheldrake——

Wil. Linnell! Does Linnell know?

Mrs. B. Yes, Sheldrake has confessed to him, and he thinks Sheldrake ought not to be made to marry the girl!

Wil. What?!

Mrs. B. That’s Mr. Linnell’s opinion!

Wil. Mr. Linnell’s opinion! Daubeney, do you hear your curate’s opinion of the Ten Commandments? Mr. Linnell’s opinion! Upon my word! Mr. Linnell’s opinion! Mr. Lin——

Enter GOODYER at back, announcing, “Mr. Linnell.”

EDGAR LINNELL enters at back, a pale, earnest, refined ascetic, about thirty, giving the impression of being overworked and underfed. He has bright, deep, sunken eyes, a beautiful smile, and a serene expression. Ordinarily his voice is soft, and his manner subdued, gentle and self-controlled. GOODYER waits at door for him to enter, and then exit.

Lin. *[Goes to MRS. WILMORE.]* How d’ye do?

Mrs. W. *[Shakes hands a little coldly.]* How d’ye do?

[LINNELL advances to MR. WILMORE, but WILMORE stands indignant, repellent.]

Lin. Is anything the matter?

[*Just bowing to* DAUBENY *and* MRS. BLANEY.]

Wil. I understand William Sheldrake has confessed to you that—and you're actually encouraging him to desert his wretched victim?

Lin. No. The whole case is most difficult. I'd rather not discuss it here.

Wil. I daresay. But I insist on discussing it here.

Mrs. B. We mustn't shirk our duty merely because it is shocking and disagreeable.

Lin. Sheldrake has thoroughly repented.

Wil. Repented? Rubbish! Blatant rubbish!

Lin. The girl has a bad character, and I believe it was she who tempted him.

Daub. Oh! Oh! Come! Come! Come!

Lin. He never promised to marry her. She is every way below him, in class, in manners, in conduct, in feeling for what is right!

Wil. Feeling for what is right! Rubbish, sir! Blatant claptrap!

Lin. Sheldrake's sisters are living with him. For their sake, I believe it will be a wrong thing to bring a girl of that stamp into the family.

Mrs. B. But what can be done with her? We must uphold the sacredness of marriage.

Lin. That's exactly what I am doing.

Wil. What! Upon my word! I never heard of anything so monstrous—so subversive of all the principles and convictions that have guided my entire life.

Lin. Have you anything more to say to me?

Wil. Yes. I hear you're supporting this scheme for turning "The Blue Lion" into a working-man's club.

Lin. Yes. An anonymous donor has come forward with the money——

Wil. Some election dodge of the dissenters, eh, Daubeny?

Daub. Well, without being uncharitable towards our dissenting friends——

Wil. Just so. I wish to do them every justice, but,

throughout my life, I have never met with more than six dissenters whom I could trust. I hope I have misjudged them.

Lin. It is expressly stipulated that politics and religion are to be excluded.

Mrs. B. Religion excluded!

Lin. Since our object is to avoid disputes; and supply the working men with pure recreation, and pure beer!

Wil. Pure beer! And pray, sir, do you constitute yourself the sole judge of pure beer?

Lin. No, I rarely taste it.

Wil. Then what is your objection to Pelly's entire?

Lin. I have none.

Wil. Then why do you set yourself against a man who must surely be a far better judge of pure beer than you?

Daub. I must say, Linnell, your action strikes me as most injudicious. Mr. Pelly is a large subscriber to our schools——

Wil. And thereby provides sound food for the children's minds, while he provides sound beer for the parents' bodies.

Daub. In your position, your conduct involves the Church herself. You are placing her in antagonism to the world around her.

Lin. She always has been in antagonism to the world around her! She always will be!

Daub. Yes, yes—in a sense. But these are troublous times for the Church. What the Church needs to-day is "safe men," pre-eminently "safe men"! [*Tapping his sentiments into his stomach with his fat fingers.*] Safe Christian men!

Lin. Have I done anything a Christian ought not to do?

Wil. It's very difficult to say what a Christian ought or ought not to do in these days, but at any rate he oughtn't to upset the parish.

Mrs. B. It must set a bad example to the whole

neighbourhood when they see their own clergyman wilfully flying in the face of all morality.

Mrs. W. You surely don't wish to get out of touch with your people?

Lin. No, I don't wish.

Daub. Then, my dear Linnell, why do it? Why stir up strife in a peaceable parish like ours? Why? Why? Why?

Wil. Yes, indeed, why? Why? Why? [*LINNELL doesn't reply.*] You see you have no answer! Daubeney, perhaps you'll leave this in my hands.

Daub. Certainly.

Wil. I'm a very easy-going man as a rule, but there comes a time when my good-nature kicks, and says, "I've had just enough of this." [*To LINNELL.*] If you wish to remain in Weybury, you will please write to Mr. Pelly that you've advised your friends to withdraw from your "Blue Lion" fad, as it is unworkable. Do you understand?

Lin. [*After a longish pause.*] Yes.

Wil. Pelly is very much upset at your attitude. You might send him some little word of apology.

Lin. Apology?!

Wil. [*Angrily.*] Yes, sir, apology! Did you catch the word?

Lin. Yes. Apology.

Wil. You will also please go this evening to William Sheldrake, and say that I insist he makes an honest woman of Sarah Piper.

Lin. By what process?

Wil. [*Enraged.*] By what process? By the good, plain, old-fashioned process of holy matrimony. He will have the banns put up next Sunday.

Lin. If he refuses?

Wil. Then I give him notice to leave his farm next Michaelmas.

Lin. Mr. Viveash is your estate agent. Wouldn't such a message come more fittingly from him?

Wil. No, sir, I choose you to deliver it, because I wish you to represent the moral aspect of the case.

Vive. [*Who has been standing, back to fire, listening and watching most attentively all through.*] Perhaps I'd better go with Linnell and represent the legal aspect.

Wil. That's as you please, so long as Sheldrake understands he has got to marry the girl.

Enter GOODYER, door right.

Good. Tea is served in the drawing-room, ma'am.

[*Exit, leaving door open.*]

Daub. [*Rising with alacrity.*] Ah!

Wil. Now, Mrs. Blaney, I feel I can go into tea with a clear conscience!

[*Glaring at LINNELL as he goes off. Exeunt*

MRS. BLANEY and WILMORE, door right.

Daub. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] I hope your cook has provided some of those delicious hot tea-cakes.

Mrs. W. Yes, I think.

Daub. There's a very excellent, dear creature!

[*Exit, right.*]

Mrs. W. Aren't you coming to tea, Mr. Linnell?

Lin. Would you mind if I stay here? I have to write my letter of "apology" to Mr. Pelly.

Mrs. W. You'll find pens and paper. Come, Mr. Viveash.

[*Exit right. VIVEASH is following her, but stops at door and looks at LINNELL, who has stood calm and bitter without moving. He comes up to him and puts his hand on LINNELL'S shoulder.*]

Vive. Linnell, you won't mind my speaking plainly?

Lin. Speak on.

Vive. For a man with a wife and two children, aren't you behaving like—well, like a silly jackass?

Lin. How?

Vive. Here is a good fat living waiting for you. Can't you let this sleepy old place go on its sleepy old way? Can't you shut your eyes, hold your tongue, and

just flick a bit of butter into our friend Wilmore's ears every now and then, eh? Isn't it worth doing?

Lin. Perhaps, but I can't do it.

Vive. Why not?

Lin. Before I entered the priesthood I spent many months in questioning my motives. I had a long, dark time, but I could see one thing clearly, and I shaped my whole life to it. I resolved I would always fearlessly say what I thought to be true, always fearlessly do what I thought to be right, and never think of consequences. That's what I'm striving to do now.

Vive. Where do you expect it will land you?

Lin. [*Looks at him with a grave smile.*] Well, if not in Paradise, at least in self-respect.

Vive. I should say it would land you in the workhouse. My dear Linnell, you aren't a baby; you're an educated man. Open your eyes! Look at the world around you, the world we've got to live in, the world we've got to make our bread and cheese in! Look at society. What is it? An organized hypocrisy everywhere! We all live by taking in each other's dirty linen, and pretending to wash it; by cashing each other's dirty little lies and shams, and passing them on! Civilization means rottenness, when you get to the core of it! It's rotten everywhere! And I fancy it's rather more rotten in this rotten little hole than anywhere else. [*LINNELL makes a protest.*] Oh yes it is! I've been forty years in a lawyer's office here. I know the history of every family in the place! If I were to take the roof off every house, and show you what's underneath—! What's the use? It's a lovely, picturesque little township, nestling at the foot of the undulating downs. Let it nestle! Take the guide-book view of the place! Let sleeping dogs lie! Think it over. Do as I say, and you'll be Vicar of Weybury in three months, and, who knows, Dean of Gilminster before you die!

Lin. Thank you. I'm afraid I must go on my way to the workhouse.

Vive. [*Shrugs his shoulders, is going off, right.*] By Jove, you will!

Lin. [*Quickly.*] Forgive me! I'm sure your advice has been most friendly. I wish I could take it. But I can't. I'm not built that way.

[*VIVEASH looks at him, chuckles ironically, and goes off, right.*

Lin. [*Left to himself, walks up and down, speaking to himself in a calm, bitter tone.*] Dear Mr. Pelly, you are a rich brewer; I am a poor curate; therefore I apologize to you. You want "The Blue Lion" for your own profit; I want it for the profit of my working men; therefore I apologize to you.

[*He laughs a little, bitter laugh, and sits down at table to write.*

Enter GOODYER at back, showing in RACHEL NEVE. She is a beautiful girl, about twenty, plainly dressed. She has a quiet, shrinking, modest manner, and delicate, refined features, with a settled, frightened expression on them. She carries a little hand-bag and an umbrella.

Good. Mrs. Wilmore is taking tea just now.

Rach. I sent her a note this morning, telling her I would take the liberty of calling.

Good. [*Placing a chair for her.*] What name?

Rach. Miss Neve.

Good. I'll tell Mrs. Wilmore.

[*Exit GOODYER, right. While he has been speaking to RACHEL he has turned up the electric lights. It has been growing gradually dark, and the sunset at window fades away into night. LINNELL has just risen, and bowed very slightly to RACHEL. During following scene he writes at table, and tears it up. RACHEL has seated herself. He goes on writing. She takes a folded letter out of her hand-bag, glances through it, and puts it back.*

Rach. I beg pardon——

Lin. Can I be of any service to you?

Rach. Perhaps you could tell me. I'm a teacher of drawing, and I've asked Mrs. Wilmore to see me, because I was told she is the leading lady in the neighbourhood.

Lin. Yes?

Rach. I hoped she might recommend me. I believe there is no drawing-master in Weybury?

Lin. No, but there are several in Gilminster. Have you any friends in Weybury?

Rach. No. I had a friend who lived near here——

Enter GOODYER, *right.*

Good. Mrs. Wilmore will see you in a few minutes.

Rach. Thank you. [*Exit* GOODYER *at back.*]

Lin. And this friend?

Rach. That was a long time ago. Do you know of any rooms in Weybury, not expensive? I'm troubling you?

Lin. Not at all. I'll write out one or two addresses for you.

Rach. Thank you.

Lin. [*Writing.*] Where are your own friends—your father and mother?

Rach. My mother died ten years ago. My father is an artist. Times were rather hard, so last spring he took an offer from a railway company in Canada to make sketches for their advertisements. He's there now.

Lin. And he left you alone? Without resources?

Rach. No, I was to have joined him, but—I stayed in England.

Lin. And your other friends?

Rach. I have no other friends.

Lin. None?

Rach. No near friends. My father has always gone from place to place painting landscapes, so we had no regular home.

Lin. [*Rises and goes to her with a sheet of paper.*] I've written several addresses there.

[*Giving her the paper.*]

Rach. Thank you.

Lin. [*Looking at her sympathetically.*] I'm afraid you've not come on a very hopeful errand. And your health has suffered——

Rach. [*Quickly.*] It's nothing. I'm quite well.

Lin. My name's Linnell. I'm the curate here. If my wife or I can be of any use to you, we live in the station road, close to the station.

Rach. Thank you.

[*He goes back to table and seats himself to write.*]

Rach. [*Again taking out the letter from hand-bag and looking round as if waiting for some one.*] Has Mrs. Wilmore any daughters whom I could teach?

Lin. No. She has an only son.

Rach. And I suppose—this son—he's too old?

Lin. For a drawing-mistress? Yes, I'm afraid. He's going to be married next month.

[*He has spoken casually, with his head over the table. A spasm of horror and fright passes over RACHEL'S face. She sits overwhelmed for some seconds, clutching the handle of her chair. He continues writing. At length she puts back the letter in hand-bag, rises and staggers towards door at back.*]

Lin. [*Rising.*] Is anything the matter?

Rach. [*Who has recovered herself.*] No, I thought perhaps Mrs. Wilmore might be too busy——

The door, right, opens, and MRS. WILMORE enters.

Lin. Here is Mrs. Wilmore.

VIVEASH follows MRS. WILMORE on.

Mrs. W. Miss Rachel Neve?

Rach. Yes.

Mrs. W. You wrote me this morning. You wish to ask my advice about giving drawing lessons in Weybury? You seem to be ill——

Rach. No—I——

Mrs. W. You've only just arrived in Weybury. Did you get any lunch?

Rach. No. I've had nothing. I suppose it's that.

Mrs. W. They shall get you something. [*Rings bell.*]

Rach. Oh, please don't trouble. I shall be better in a moment.

Mrs. W. My dear child, you're fainting from want of food. [*GOODYER appears, door at back.*] Goodyer, show this young lady into the library, and give her some cold meat and tea.

Good. This way, miss.

Mrs. W. Why did you come to Weybury of all places to look for pupils?

Rach. I was told that you——

Vive. Have you brought any letters of recommendation?

Mrs. W. Who mentioned my name to you? [*No answer.*] There! We won't bother you now. Go and eat something and come back here, and we'll see what can be done.

Rach. Thank you.

[*She goes off, door back. GOODYER waits and closes it after her.*]

Mrs. W. Extraordinary application!

Vive. Looks a little queer. I should get to know something about Missy before you help her.

Mrs. W. Oh, I can do nothing for her, poor creature, except give her a sovereign, and pass her on. Are you coming back to tea?

Vive. No. I've had my single cup.

[*LINNELL is standing absorbed. MRS. WILMORE looks significantly at VIVEASH with regard to LINNELL. VIVEASH shrugs his shoulders. She smiles and exit.*]

Vive. [*Goes to LINNELL.*] Now, Linnell, we'll go

and administer our respective doses of law and gospel to William Sheldrake!

Lin. I can only advise him as I've already done.

Vive. Then you'd better keep your mouth shut, and let me administer law and gospel too!

*As they are going off, door at back, HELEN and LEN-
NARD enter at window.*

Hel. How d'ye do, Mr. Linnell?

Lin. How d'ye do? [*Shaking hands.*]

Hel. I've heard from my father. I wrote him that I wished you to marry us.

Lin. I shall be very pleased, if it's Mr. Wilmore's wish.

Len. Oh yes, delighted. Very kind of you, Linnell.

Vive. Now, Linnell.

[*Exeunt LINNELL and VIVEASH at back.*]

Len. I'm afraid old Daubeny won't like our shunting him for the marriage.

Hel. I couldn't be married by Mr. Daubeny! [*Going to piano, which is open, playing disjointed chords during the following scene.*] To be blessed by those fat hands! [*A little shudder.*] There would be something almost profane about it. Don't you feel that?

Len. No. Old Daub is a very good sort of parson, as parsons go.

Hel. [*Playing a chord.*] Len, I've been talking to your mother about marriage.

Len. Yes?

Hel. It seems I've had altogether wrong ideas about it.

Len. How?

Hel. [*Playing occasional bars.*] Perhaps my father was wrong to bring me up so strictly. He ought to have made me go more into society. But I never liked it. I always kept back from the world. It seems to me that if you and I could live here always, looking after our own people, and restoring the dear old church——

Len. Well, why shouldn't we?

Hel. That would be an ideal life for me. Would it content you?

Len. You want me to go to Parliament, don't you?

Hel. But that means living in London. And London means society. And society means doing as people in society do. Since I had that talk with your mother, I begin to hate life.

Len. What did my mother tell you?

Hel. I questioned her about you.

Len. I hope she didn't tell you anything very alarming?

Hel. It wasn't what she told me. It was what she wouldn't tell me.

Len. Like a good mother, she wanted to make the best of me.

Hel. Yes, I saw that. But that made me think the worst. Lennard, you aren't very different from my ideal of you?

Len. I hope not.

Hel. Marriage is very sacred to me. It's a sacrament. [*Vehemently.*] Yes, it's a sacrament! And it mustn't be less to you than it is to me! Tell me it isn't!

Len. No—no——

Hel. Oh, Len, I love you so much. [*Throwing her arms round him.*] You know father has told Mr. Viveash to settle everything upon you.

Len. You're too good—too generous!

Hel. No—that's nothing. I've settled more than that! I've settled all my love for always! I've given you all—everything that doesn't belong to God. And I can't bear——

Len. What?

Hel. To think you haven't settled everything upon me! [*Bursting into tears.*]

Len. I have. You're a little hysterical.

Hel. No. I'm quite calm and sensible. Len, there is no one [*passionately*—No woman can ever come between us, and say that you——

Len. Dearest, you're distressing yourself about nothing.

[He tries to kiss her, but she escapes from his embrace.]

Hel. You won't tell me. If you hide anything from me, I shall be the most miserable girl that ever lived. Are you coming in to tea? *[Going to door, right.]*

Len. In a few minutes. I must give Jenkins orders about the beaters to-morrow.

[Exit HELEN, right. He stands distressed and perplexed, makes a gesture as if dismissing the subject, and is going off at back when he comes face to face with RACHEL, who enters.]

Len. Rachel! My God!

Rach. Lennard, forgive my coming. I was obliged——

Len. Shush! *[Closes door.]* You've not gone out to your father?

Rach. I daren't!

Len. Daren't?!

Rach. Can't you guess?

Len. Rachel!

Rach. I've just heard you are to be married. It isn't true?

Len. Yes. *[She makes a gesture of despair.]* I told you it was impossible our friendship could continue.

Rach. Friendship?!

Len. And we parted and said good-bye.

Rach. You promised we should meet again, when I came back to England.

Len. Why didn't you go to your father as we arranged?

Rach. There was no boat for a fortnight. Then I began to be afraid. So I stayed on in England till I was sure—Lennard, it's the worst.

Len. Good Heaven! But when I left you three months ago, you had no thought——

Rach. Not then. Oh, this suspense has been terrible! Lennard, you will marry me, you promised?!

Len. I was free then. I'm not free now.

Rach. And you never told me you were engaged!

Len. I wasn't actually engaged when I last saw you.

Rach. But you were going to be. And it was to get rid of me! Do you remember all you said to me? And you never meant it!

Len. Yes. I did mean it. I did love you, Rachel. And even now—if there were any way out of it! That's impossible now! But of course I'll see you through as far as I can. [*She shows despair, sits down helplessly.*] Why did you come here? Why didn't you write to me?

Rach. I thought you might be away on some engineering work, and then the letter would be opened. I did write this morning——

[*Half taking the letter out of the hand-bag.*]

Len. Where are you living?

Rach. I stayed at my cousin's till yesterday. I came here, thinking perhaps I could give drawing lessons, and then if your mother should only take to me, all might be well. Oh, what shall I do?

Len. There's no absolute danger yet, for some months, is there?

Rach. Not till the spring.

Len. That gives you time to turn round.

Rach. But it must come! And then! I can't face it!

Len. Rachel! Don't give way like this! Rachel!

He is bending over her, consoling her, when MRS. WILMORE enters, right.

Mrs. W. Lennard! You know this lady?

Len. Yes—I——

Mrs. W. And you allow her to come here?

Len. Mother, I've behaved like a scoundrel to her.

Mrs. W. We won't talk of that now. [*To RACHEL.*] Will you please leave at once?

Len. Mother, she's the best and truest girl! Her only fault is that she trusted to my word, and I broke it! We must help her.

Mrs. W. Certainly. We'll do whatever is right. [*To RACHEL.*] Please go now.

[*Going towards door at back.*]

Len. Mother, it isn't only herself. [*MRS. WILMORE looks inquiringly.*] There will be another.

Mrs. W. Another?

Len. My child!

Mrs. W. [*To RACHEL.*] Is this true?

Rach. Oh, I think I shall kill myself!

Mrs. W. Hush! Of course we'll help you, but you mustn't be seen in Weybury. [*Takes out watch.*] Let me think. You'll just have time to catch the 6.15 to Gilminster. Go there, to "The Bear Hotel." Stay there to-night. I'll come to you to-morrow morning, and arrange something. You'll go?

Rach. Yes. But Lennard—

Mrs. W. [*Quickly.*] My son's name mustn't be mentioned. Promise me you won't bring him into this.

Rach. Of course I won't! I promise.

Mrs. W. Remember that. It is the only condition on which I can help you. You understand?

Rach. Yes. I love him too much to—

Mrs. W. Hush! You've no time to spare.

Rach. [*Going towards LENNARD.*] Good-bye. I—

[*Nearly breaks down.*]

Mrs. W. [*Intercepting.*] Please—no scenes here. You must go.

[*She goes towards door.*]

Len. Rachel, you forgive me? [*She nods. Suddenly.*] Mother, I can't let her go like this!

Mrs. W. [*Intercepting, very imperious.*] Lennard, you forget what is due to me, and to—others. Let me save you from the consequences of your folly, if I can.

[*Rings bell. LENNARD goes up to window.*]

VIVEASH and LINNELL enter at back.

Vive. Oh, you're still busy.

Mrs. W. No. Is it anything important?

Vive. No. A marriage has been arranged between William Sheldrake and Sarah Piper.

Mrs. W. Oh, I'm glad. That's settled then.

Enter GOODYER at back with a paper on tray.

Good. Cook asked me to give you this receipt, ma'am.

Mrs. W. Oh, yes. [Takes receipt.

Enter MRS. BLANEY, right.

Mrs. W. Goodyer, show this young lady out, and put her into the way to the station.

Good. Yes, ma'am. [Waits at door.

Mrs. W. [To RACHEL.] You'll find "The Bear" a very comfortable hotel. Till to-morrow, then. Good-night. [Shaking hands.

Rach. Good-night. [Going off.

Lin. [As RACHEL passes him.] I hope you'll be successful. [Offers hand.] Good-night.

Rach. Good-night.

[Shakes hands with him, and hurries off at back without looking up. GOODYER closes the door, and exit after her.

Vive. So you're going to take up Missy?

Mrs. W. Oh, no. I'm shopping in Gilminster to-morrow, and I've promised to give her a few introductions—that's all!

Mrs. B. Dear Mrs. Wilmore, be very careful. She struck me as——

Mrs. W. How?

Mrs. B. Well, she seemed to avoid meeting my glance. I think it's such a good plan to fix your eye steadily upon persons, such as servants and governesses—like this—give them one piercing look, and if they flinch, have nothing to do with them!

DAUBENY *enters right, followed by WILMORE.*

Daub. [To MRS. WILMORE.] Ah! Ah! I'm sure you've forgotten it again!

Mrs. W. No, here it is. [Giving him the receipt.

Daub. Thanks. My best respects to your cook. Quails Estelle!

[Sits, takes out his spectacles, and affectionately ponders his receipt.

Wil. [To LINNELL and VIVEASH.] Did you give William Sheldrake my message?

Vive. Oh yes. We put the matter to William in a nutshell, didn't we, Linnell? And the result is, up go William and Sarah's banns next Sunday.

Wil. That is so far satisfactory.

Daub. Most satisfactory!

[Folds up his receipt carefully, and puts it in his pocket.

Wil. On consideration, Linnell, you might take up this subject in your discourse next Sunday.

Lin. What?

Wil. Eh, Daubeney?

Daub. An excellent idea!

Wil. Unless you prefer to deal with it yourself, eh?

Daub. No, I'll leave it in Mr. Linnell's hands.

Mrs. B. It's high time that somebody instilled some sort of morality into our young people.

Wil. [To LINNELL.] Next Sunday evening then. You'll please let William Sheldrake and Sarah Piper and the members of their family know that I wish them all to be present.

Lin. What?! You wish me to start this wretched pair on their newly married life by crying out their fault from the housetops, and shaming them before all their neighbours!

Wil. [Very angry.] Yes, sir, I do! Wretched pair indeed! Don't they deserve to be wretched? Shame them?! Don't they deserve to be shamed? I beg you will hold them up severely as a warning to others.

And I beg you will represent my attitude in this matter as dictated by the fatherly interest I take in all my tenants! [*Tapping the table vigorously with his forefingers to emphasize his sentiments.*] And I beg you will let it be understood that I have only one rule in these cases, that I will tolerate no tampering with the plain dictates of morality on my estate! [*Ceases tapping the table, and rises with a self-satisfied air.*] And I don't doubt we shall all be very much edified next Sunday evening! [*Goes towards the group of DAUBENY, VIVEASH and MRS. BLANEY, turns round to LINNELL.*] Did you hear what I said?

Lin. Yes, I heard you.

[*WILMORE goes to the group, and is seen to be justifying his outburst to them in a vigorous, self-satisfied way. MRS. WILMORE and LENNARD have remained near window at back, listening with great apprehension. LINNELL stands calm, self-controlled.*]

CURTAIN.

Two hours elapse between Acts I and II



ACT II.

SCENE: *Sitting-room at MR. LINNELL'S. A plainly, sparsely furnished room in an old rambling house. On the left is a bow window looking out on the street. On the right is a fireplace with fire burning. In the back wall to the right is a door leading to the staircase, with one step showing below it. In the back wall in the centre is a door leading into a passage, and beyond the passage another door leading into EDGAR LINNELL'S study. When both doors are open, a view is obtained of the study beyond them. In the back wall to the left is a small window with little red curtains, drawn apart, so that the passage can again be seen, lighted by an oil lamp, and leading up to the front door of the house. An easy chair above the fireplace with a table above it against the left wall. Another table is down stage left with chairs to the right and above it. Cheap prints on the walls. Cheap, but not ugly, furniture. The place gives an impression of genteel poverty, but contains nothing in bad taste.*

THE TIME is about eight on the evening of the same day, and the room is lighted with oil-lamps. On the table to the left are a rug, and the umbrella and hand-bag which RACHEL has carried in Act I.

Discover PATTY showing in MRS. BLANEY. PATTY is the LINNELLS' servant, a neat, sharp, little country girl in a cotton frock. They come just inside the room, and leave the door open.

Mrs. Blaney.



R. BLANEY is still here?

Patty. Yes, ma'am. In the study with Mr. and Mrs. Linnell binding up the poor young lady's foot.

Mrs. B. [*At door, listening across the passage.*] How did the accident happen?

Patty. The lady slipped down the steps at the station, and sprained her foot so bad as she couldn't walk.

Mrs. B. What made them bring her here?

Patty. Mrs. Linnell was going by train to Gilminster to do her shopping, and saw the young lady fall. And, as our house was close by, she had her brought here in Mr. Perry's new red van.

Mrs. B. [*Listening.*] I can hear Mr. Linnell's voice, and the Doctor's, but I can't distinguish a word.

Patty. Oh, isn't it annoying, ma'am, when you just can't catch——

[*MRS. BLANEY frowns at her, and comes away from door to the table, examines the rug, umbrella, and hand-bag.*]

Mrs. B. Do these belong to the young person?

Patty. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. B. A very peculiar rug! Much more like a man's rug than a lady's!

Patty. It has got a man's look about it!

Mrs. B. And quite a common umbrella.

[*Examining the texture.*]

Patty. [*Taking up the umbrella when MRS. BLANEY lays it down.*] Yes, ma'am. Not a penny more than seven and sixpence.

Mrs. B. [*Taking up the hand-bag, looking at the initials.*] R. N. I suppose it's the drawing-mistress person who called on Mrs. Wilmore. [*She has managed to open the hand-bag and peep in. Suddenly.*] *Patty,* please tell Dr. Blaney his dinner is getting cold, and that I'm waiting.

Patty. Yes, ma'am.

[*PATTY goes across passage, and is seen to enter the study door opposite. The moment her back is turned, MRS. BLANEY takes a folded letter out of the hand-bag, hesitates, puts it back, looks longingly at bag, gives way to her curiosity, takes out the letter, reads: "Wednesday morning"—that's this morning. Glancing round at study door, reads: "I am in Weybury, and must see you at once."*—*The study door, which has been open a little way, is opened wide by DR. BLANEY, who appears at it, speaking off into study. He is a stout, middle-aged man, with a bland, sleek, formal, deferential, bedside manner. MRS. BLANEY hurriedly slips back the letter into the outside pocket of the hand-bag, and gets away from table.*

Dr. B. [*At the study door.*] Rest the foot entirely. Don't leave that sofa. Above all, no excitement. Perfect quiet. Good evening.

[*He speaks that at the study door, and crosses passage into room. MRS. LINNELL and LINNELL follow him in from the study. MRS. LINNELL is in outdoor clothes. LINNELL closes the door as he enters.*

Dr. B. A sprain. Quite a simple sprain. No cause for serious alarm. There is also a temperature which may, or may not, develop into some more or less pronounced form of fever. She says she has been living with some cousin in London. I should advise getting her back there at once.

Lin. There's no train for London to-night, and if she has a temperature, mightn't it be dangerous?

Dr. B. Well, from that point of view, it is inadvisable to move her.

Mrs. B. Who is she, and what is she doing in Wey-bury?

Mrs. L. She seems to be a lady.

Mrs. B. There are so many sorts of ladies nowadays. And before you allow her to have an infectious fever here, with your two children so liable to catch anything and everything——

Mrs. L. Her box was labelled for Gilminster. I'm going there. Shall I order a carriage, and take her over?

Lin. What would you do with her?

Mrs. B. Send her to the best hotel. She'll be far more comfortable there than staying here and running up a heavy doctor's bill, without any means of paying.

Dr. B. Under the circumstances, that might be the wiser plan.

Lin. I don't think we'll turn her out to-night.

Dr. B. In that case we must do our best for her. I'll send in a soothing draught, and a lotion for the foot. As regards diet—a little arrowroot or gruel; nothing heavy; no meat; no solids; no stimulants. A little soda and milk to drink. Above all, no excitement. Perfect quiet. Of course, if the temperature should rise still higher—but we trust it won't. [*To LINNELL*]. Good evening. [*To MRS. LINNELL*]. Good evening, Mrs. Linnell. Now, Matilda!

[*He goes off into passage, followed by LINNELL.*

They are seen through the window talking at lamp.

Mrs. B. Where's her other luggage?

Mrs. L. At the station.

Mrs. B. What's it like?

Mrs. L. One large trunk.

Mrs. B. I should unpack it for her, and look very carefully through everything.

Mrs. L. I couldn't do that.

Dr. B. [*Voice from passage.*] Now, Matilda!

Mrs. B. Coming, dear! I'll run in again after

dinner, and see if you've found out anything about her.

[Exit at back. She is seen to pass the window with LINNELL and DR. BLANEY. MRS. LINNELL takes up the hand-bag and looks at the initials. The front door is heard to close. A moment later LINNELL re-enters the room.]

Lin. Rather unfortunate, eh, Mary? Stopped your shopping?

Mrs. L. No, they keep open late on market night, and sell off cheap. One must save every penny when one has an extravagant husband like you.

Lin. Extravagant? I? In what?

Mrs. L. In your ideas of right and wrong. They're far too expensive for our position. You can't afford them on a hundred and twenty a year.

Lin. I can't afford to do what's right on a hundred and twenty a year?

Mrs. L. No, not when it offends everybody, and brings your children to beggary.

Lin. *[Very gently strokes her hair.]* "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women."

Mrs. L. *[Edging away from his caress.]* No, I speak like a good wife and mother. There's scarcely a labourer's home in Weybury that hasn't more comforts and luxuries than ours. Edgar, won't you do as Mr. Wilmore wishes?

Lin. How?

Mrs. L. Study him. Make friends with him. Then he'd give you the living. *[Glancing out of window.]* There's the signal down. I shall only just catch the train. *[Kissing him.]* You're to do as I tell you. For our children's sake!

Lin. I can't bow the knee to Baal.

Mrs. L. Yes you can. It's the only way to be vicar of Weybury.

[Exit at back, passes window in passage, and off at front door, which is heard to shut]

behind her. LINNELL stands perplexed, sighs deeply, goes to staircase door, opens it, takes off the coat he is wearing, takes from peg a very old, threadbare coat, which is hanging there, hangs up the coat he has taken off.

Enter PATTY from study.

Patty. The young lady has asked for her rug and things.

Lin. [*Putting on the old coat.*] You took my letter to Mr. Wilmore?

Patty. Yes, sir. He was in the hall, and he took it and read it.

Lin. Well?

Patty. He got as red as a turkey cock. "Oh, indeed," he says. "Tell Mr. Linnell I'll come and talk to him myself after dinner," he says, and then he marched off as if all the world belonged to him.

Lin. That will do, Patty.

[Turns from her towards the fire. PATTY takes up the rug, umbrella and bag, and goes off with them. She carries the hand-bag upside down, and the letter slips out of the pocket on to the floor near the door. LINNELL stands in perplexity, walks a step or two, turns, sees the letter, goes up to it, picks it up.]

Lin. [*Reading.*] "Wednesday morning. I am in Weybury and must see you." Who's this? "You must keep your promise, or the shame will drive me mad. I am coming to call on your mother in the hope of seeing you, and giving you this. You will marry me——"
[He shows surprise, and his hand drops with the letter at his side.] Shame!!

[The door at back opens, and RACHEL stands there, pale and distracted, leaning on a walking-stick, and against the doorway.]

Lin. You shouldn't have moved. Your foot?

Rach. [*Indicating stick.*] I found this in there. I've lost a letter——

Lin. [*Offering the letter.*] Is it this?

Rach. [*Takes it eagerly, just glances at it.*] You've read it?

Lin. Only the opening sentences. At first, I thought it was addressed to me.

Rach. [*Darting at him a look of eager inquiry.*] You know——?

[He does not reply. She limps hurriedly to the fire, puts the letter on it, pokes it into the flame with the stick, and then drops exhausted into the easy chair. He comes up to her with a sympathetic gesture.]

Rach. You wish me to leave here?

Lin. Not till you have found another home.

Rach. Home? I shall never have a home, unless—
Oh, what shall I do?

Lin. That letter was written to somebody in Weybury, and never delivered. [*She does not reply.*] To Mr. Lennard Wilmore?

Rach. [*Quickly.*] No.

Lin. No?

Rach. No. I mustn't say whom it was written to. That doesn't matter. [*Suddenly attempting to rise.*] I must go to Gilminster.

[She rises, but her foot gives way, and she sinks into chair.]

Lin. There's no train till eleven. You can't go to-night.

Rach. I'm sorry to be so much trouble.

Lin. Don't think of that. Think only how we can help you to meet this.

Rach. Thank you. [*A pause. She suddenly looks at him.*] I want to ask you one question.

Lin. Ask me.

Rach. Because I've done wrong, my child won't do wrong—won't grow up to be wicked?

Lin. Your child's future is in your hands to shape.

Begin to change from this moment. There lies the best hope for your child.

Rach. You think I'm a bad girl?

Lin. No; but if you are, then you're my especial charge.

Rach. I'm not a bad girl. I've made one mistake, and now I can't get back.

Lin. Are you sure of that?

Rach. [*Eagerly.*] Can I? Show me the way!

Lin. There's only the one old way. You've done wrong. You repent.

Rach. Oh yes, I repent. But repentance doesn't get you back. I want to get back to where I was.

Lin. That's impossible. Things can never be as they were. But put the past behind you. Look to the future. Resolve to bear the burden of your wrongdoing bravely.

Rach. I can't! I can't face it! All my life long! All my life long!

Lin. Life's a running stream. However foul and muddy it may be, it clears and purifies itself as it goes along. So it will be with yours.

Rach. No! No! How can I meet people? Everybody will avoid me!

Lin. I won't. I'll help you. I'll be your friend.

Rach. [*Looks up gratefully.*] How kind you are!

Lin. Tell me what I can do. Shall I write to your father?

Rach. No, not yet. He's so happy out there with his work. And when he comes home—to me!

Lin. But he'll forgive you?

Rach. Oh yes, he's kindness itself. That's why I don't wish to break his heart.

Lin. Let me speak to the man who brought you to this.

Rach. The man who——?

Lin. Lennard Wilmore.

Rach. But it wasn't—you're quite wrong in thinking that letter was for him. [*He looks sternly at her, her*

eyes drop, she shows confusion.] I mean—it would be useless—you're mistaken.

Lin. [Very cold and stern.] I can do nothing for you unless you're quite truthful with me. Your foot is paining you. Let me help you back to the sofa.

[Helping her to rise, giving her his arm to the door.]

Rach. [Suddenly.] Oh, don't you turn against me!

Lin. I won't. Let me try to set things straight for you, will you?

Rach. Yes—at least—Oh, I don't know what to do! *[Suddenly, with great agitation.]* I mustn't stay here——

[A knock at the front door.]

Lin. Hush! Some visitor! Calm yourself. Make up your mind to stay to-night, and in the morning we'll decide what to do.

Rach. Thank you! That's not Mrs. Wilmore?

Lin. Rest there a moment. I'll see who it is.

[He is putting her into the chair near the door, when PATTY, who has opened the front door, enters from passage, showing in HELEN.]

Patty. Here's Miss Plugenet, sir.

Hel. [Entering.] Oh, I'm so sorry. You're engaged?

Lin. No. Come in. A lady who has met with an accident. We're taking care of her for the night.

[HELEN and RACHEL bow slightly to each other.]

Hel. You're suffering——

Rach. My foot is sprained.

Hel. Can I do anything for you?

Rach. No, thank you.

Lin. Patty, help the lady back to the sofa.

Patty. Lean on me, Miss. Shove me about as much as you like. I'm as strong as a cart-horse.

Rach. [Looking round a little wildly.] You mustn't think—what you thought is not true——

Lin. [*Soothingly.*] Let Patty take care of you. I'll come to you in a few minutes.

[*Helping PATTY and RACHEL off at door at back. He closes door after them.*]

Hel. I didn't know you had a visitor. You're busy?

Lin. No. Sit down. What is it?

Hel. Mr. Linnell, we're almost strangers, but I feel I may trust you absolutely. Isn't that so?

Lin. Yes.

Hel. I'm in great perplexity.

Lin. Tell me.

Hel. [*Suddenly.*] Ought I to marry Lennard?

Lin. What makes you ask me that?

Hel. Because—Mrs. Wilmore puts me off. And I've come to you, because you won't put me off. You won't tell me these things don't matter; that all young men sow their wild oats; and that I'm foolish to ask from Lennard what I bring to him—my whole heart, my whole nature, my whole life. I've explained myself badly. But you understand?

Lin. I think I do.

Hel. Then ought I to marry him?

Lin. You love him?

Hel. [*Warmly.*] With all my heart. Should I have accepted him else? I came fresh from school. That was four months ago, and for the first month all was like a happy dream. Then I got this terrible doubt, and I can't rest. I'm not foolish! I'm not hysterical! I can't marry him if I feel he is still bound to—to someone who came before me. What can I do?

Lin. Shouldn't you go to your father?

Hel. No. He wouldn't understand. That's why I came to you.

Lin. [*After a long pause.*] I cannot advise you.

Hel. You can't? Isn't it your duty to advise me? Isn't that why you are a clergyman?

[*LINNELL takes a step or two in great perplexity.*]

Lin. Have you heard anything — or seen — or guessed?

Hel. I've questioned Mrs. Wilmore. Just now, after dinner, I begged her to be quite frank with me, but I feel she's hiding something. That drove me to you. Do you know anything?

Lin. That is a question I did not hear.

Hel. Then you do know. [*He turns away from her very coldly.*] I beg your pardon. I'm wrong to speak like that. But I trust you. I throw myself upon you. Advise me as you would your own sister!

Lin. Let me think this over. Come to me to-morrow morning, will you?

Hel. Yes. You don't blame me for this? I'm not a traitor to Lennard?

Lin. Not if you are true to your best instinct.

Hel. It is my best instinct, and I must obey it. [*A knock at the front door. PATTY goes to it from study.*] I'll come to you to-morrow morning, then? [*He nods.*] Thank you so much.

Lin. For what?

Hel. You quiet me, and comfort me. I feel you're quite honest.

Lin. [*Smiling.*] Are honest men so scarce?

Enter PATTY at back, showing in LENNARD, in evening dress. Exit PATTY.

Len. Ah! I guessed I should find you here. [*Looking anxiously from one to the other.*] More spiritual advice and ghostly comfort, eh, Linnell? I begin to be jealous.

Hel. You shouldn't speak like that. You make sacred things so cheap.

Len. [*Betraying a little nervousness and alarm.*] I beg your pardon. I interrupted you. [*Looking from one to the other.*] Has anything happened?

Hel. No. Oh, yes—that young lady—can we do anything for her?

Len. Ah, Linnell, my mother heard of the accident at the station. She's coming here presently.

Lin. Indeed!

Len. She has taken a great interest in this young girl. Now, Helen. Good night, Linnell.

Lin. [*Puts his hand on LENNARD'S shoulder.*] Will you come back by-and-by?

Len. Why?

Lin. I want to speak to you.

Len. Certainly, but——

Hel. Why not stay now?

Len. I must see you home.

Hel. No. It's only across two fields, and it's moonlight. I'll leave him with you, Mr. Linnell.

Len. Well, if you wish——

Hel. I do. [*Going off at back.*] Oh, don't trouble.

[*To LINNELL, who accompanies her to the front door and opens it for her. Meantime LENNARD shows great apprehension, goes up to door, looks after them, tries to compose himself, awaits LINNELL'S return with great anxiety. LINNELL re-enters, closes the door after him.*]

Lin. Will you sit down? [*LENNARD sits apprehensively.*] Mrs. Wilmore takes a great interest in Miss Neve?

Len. Neve—is that her name?

Lin. Didn't you know?

Len. I think my mother mentioned it.

Lin. Does Mrs. Wilmore know Miss Neve's history?

Len. I suppose she has told my mother something about herself.

Lin. How much does Mrs. Wilmore know?

Len. You're very mysterious. What do you mean?

Lin. I mean, does Mrs. Wilmore know the history of Miss Neve's relations with you?

Len. [*Starts up, betrays himself, then quickly recovers, stands face to face with LINNELL for a moment.*]

Relations with me! What bee have you got in your bonnet now? I'll send my mother down to you. You'd better ask her. *[Going off, opens door.]*

Lin. Stop. I'm trying to save those dear to you from terrible sorrow and shame. To-morrow it may be too late.

[LENNARD closes door and comes down to him.]

Lin. *[Very tenderly.]* Come, my dear lad! You see I know! So spare yourself all further equivocation, and let me help you if I can.

Len. It's a pretty bad business, isn't it?

Lin. Trust me. Did you promise to marry her?

Len. I suppose I did. When a man's in love he promises everything.

Lin. And you became engaged to Miss Plugenet, knowing that this other——

Len. No, I'm not quite so bad as that. I hadn't seen Helen since we were children. I was in Scotland last spring in charge of the railway, and when Mr. Neve left his daughter to go to Canada, she and I were thrown together a good deal. Then the railway was finished, and I came home and met Helen. Before I became engaged I saw Miss Neve again for a few days. We said, "Good-bye," and parted, thinking it was all at an end. It was only to-day that I knew the cursed truth.

Lin. What do you intend to do?

Len. My mother has promised to take care of her.

Lin. And Miss Plugenet?

Len. There's no need she should know, is there?

Lin. You'd marry Miss Plugenet, knowing this other one has your promise, knowing what she is going to suffer for you!

Len. It is rough on her, poor girl! And she's really good. It was her very innocence—and she did love me! When I remember how her face used to light up with the loveliest smile when she caught sight of me—by Jove, Linnell, a man may get to be a big scoundrel without meaning it, and without knowing it.

Lin. But when he does know it, then he resolutely

sets to work to undo the wrong he has done—as you mean to do?

Len. Well, of course we shall provide for her.

Lin. Yes—but Miss Plugenet?

[A knock at the front door.]

Len. I expect that's my mother. [*PATTY goes to front door and admits MRS. WILMORE.*] You'll help us to keep this quiet, eh? You won't go against us, and let it all come out?

Mrs. W. [*Opens the door, and speaks to PATTY.*] In here? Oh yes. [*She enters.*] Ah, Len, why didn't you go back with Helen? Run back home, I want to have a little chat with Mr. Linnell about this young drawing-mistress.

[Looking at LINNELL.]

Lin. [*Stern and dignified.*] If you please.

[MRS. WILMORE, arrested by his manner, looks inquiringly at him and LENNARD.]

Len. Mother, he knows.

Mrs. W. Knows what? What has this girl been telling you?

Lin. Nothing. By accident I saw a letter she wrote to your son.

Mrs. W. Why should she write to Lennard?

Lin. Isn't it very natural?

[LENNARD is about to speak, but MRS. WILMORE secretly hushes him with a warning gesture.]

Mrs. W. Was this letter addressed to Lennard?

Lin. No.

Mrs. W. Then to whom?

Lin. To no one.

Mrs. W. And you jump to the conclusion——where is this girl? [*Going to door. LINNELL intercepts her.*]

Lin. One moment. She's very feverish and excited. Let me prepare her first.

Mrs. W. You won't prompt her to repeat this story?

Lin. Story? You know it, then?

Mrs. W. It's easy to guess. I must see her, and get at the truth.

Lin. The truth is as you know it.

[*Exit to passage.* MRS. WILMORE watches him off, then turns quickly to LENNARD. Her action throughout is rapid, keen, resolute, energetic, resourceful, remorseless, unflinching.]

Mrs. W. Quick, Len! What has taken place?

Len. He accused me, and of course I denied it.

Mrs. W. You denied it?

Len. At first. But, when I saw the game was up, I gave in.

Mrs. W. Gave in?

Len. I said I was sorry.

Mrs. W. What else? Tell me all.

Len. I'm afraid I let out I'd promised to marry the girl.

Mrs. W. [*With a gesture of despair.*] You've committed social suicide! You've ruined yourself!

Len. Can't we get him to hold his tongue?

Mrs. W. I'm afraid not. I'll try. I'll try everything! [*With a sudden thought.*] You say you did deny it at first?

Len. Yes. I rounded on him, and asked him what bee he had got in his bonnet!

Mrs. W. Yes! Yes! And then you said you were sorry, and pitied her, and he totally misunderstood you. It's only his word against yours. If we can only get the girl out of the way! What evidence is there to connect her with you in Scotland?

Len. Nothing that anybody can lay hold of.

Mrs. W. Think! There were other young fellows there—your chums on the railway?

Len. Bruce Kerrick.

Mrs. W. [*Looking at him.*] It might have been him?

Len. It might, but it wasn't.

Mrs. W. Where is he now?

Len. In South Africa.

Mrs. W. South Africa? Good! Your father will be here directly. You'd better not wait. Leave this to me. Oh, Len, if I can save you yet!

Len. You are a brick, mother! And I've brought you nothing but trouble.

Mrs. W. Never mind that now. [*Opening the door for him.*] Go! [*LENNARD goes noiselessly into passage.*]

Mrs. W. [*Watches him off.*] Hush!

[*As he goes off, at front door. He closes the front door noiselessly behind him, and she comes into the room, thoughtful, scheming, deeply considering. After a moment LINNELL re-enters from study, and comes into room. MRS. WILMORE composes her features.*]

Lin. [*Entering.*] Your son has gone?

Mrs. W. There was no reason for him to stay, was there?

Lin. We must come to some understanding about Miss Neve.

Mrs. W. Yes. What is to be done with her? You can't expect Mrs. Linnell to nurse a stranger through a long illness.

Lin. The sprain will only last a few days. But there's a fever——

Mrs. W. Yes, poor creature! I know of some excellent rooms in Gilminster. I'll take entire charge of her myself, and see that she's thoroughly nursed.

Lin. Pardon me, when I just now told her you were here, she seemed very much distressed.

Mrs. W. Why should she be distressed?

Lin. [*Sternly.*] Mrs. Wilmore, if we are to find some way out of this wretched business, I must beg you to be quite candid with me.

Mrs. W. [*Rather hotly.*] I don't understand you! Why shouldn't I be allowed to take care of Miss Neve?

Lin. You forget, there is another question behind.

Mrs. W. What question?

Lin. Miss Plugenet. [*A loud knock at the front door.*]

Mrs. W. I believe that's Mr. Wilmore. He doesn't know about this. [*Another loud, impatient knock.*]

Perhaps it would be better not to tell him for the present, at least not until you and I have decided what to do.

After the second knock WILMORE has entered at front door into passage. PATTY, who has come out of the study to open the door for him, meets him in passage.

Wil. [*Voice in passage.*] Mr. Linnell at home? Please show me in to him.

[PATTY opens the door and shows him in. He blusters in, and closes the door after him.]

Wil. Excuse this unceremonious entrance, Linnell, but your letter about Sheldrake has thoroughly upset me. Coming just before dinner too—I could scarcely touch a morsel. Haunch of venison too! You saw me refuse everything, Charlotte?

Mrs. W. Yes, but something else has arisen——

Wil. I don't care what has arisen. We'll attend to this first. Now, sir, I've been talking with your Vicar, and we're thoroughly agreed—— [*MRS. WILMORE is making covert signs.*] Please don't interrupt me, Charlotte. It comes to this—you will either uphold my ideas as regards morality, or you will leave Weybury forthwith. Which do you mean to do?

Lin. What are your ideas as regards morality?

Wil. [*Upset.*] Upon my word! My ideas of morality, sir [*tapping the table with his forefingers*], are the good, plain, old-fashioned ideas which all right-minded persons hold! And always have held! And always will hold! Do you, or do you not, intend to carry out my instructions respecting William Sheldrake?

Lin. Meantime, what are your instructions respecting your own son?

Wil. My son?

Lin. Look at home, Mr. Wilmore! Deal with your own household first.

Wil. I don't know what you mean. Explain yourself, sir!

Lin. You will have no tampering with the plain dictates of morality? You have only one rule in these cases? Do you wish it to be carried out in the case of your own son, and the girl in the next room?

Wil. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] Do you know anything about this?

PATTY enters at back.

Patty. If you please, sir, will you come to the young lady? She's light-headed, and says she must see you——

Lin. I'll come to her.

[*Exit PATTY into study. LINNELL follows her off.*]

Wil. Charlotte—— [*To MRS. WILMORE, who is following LINNELL. Exit LINNELL, closing door after him.*] Is this true? [*MRS. WILMORE nods.*] Does the girl mean to kick up a fuss?

Mrs. W. No. If I can get hold of her, I think she'll be persuaded to go away and keep quiet. It's Linnell we have to reckon with.

Wil. I wish now that I hadn't been so very strict about Sheldrake.

Mrs. W. Sheldrake?! It's Lennard I'm thinking of! We must buy or silence Linnell somehow—at any price.

Wil. I don't feel very much like eating humble pie to a curate. [*Bursts out.*] It's abominable of Lennard to place me in a position where I—and after all I've done for morality too!

Mrs. W. Oh, please don't. Can't you see, if this comes out, the marriage with Helen will be broken off, and Lennard will be ruined?

Wil. Lennard ruined! We shall all be ruined! Viveash is in it too! They'll foreclose the mortgages, and then what becomes of us?

Mrs. W. What does it matter what becomes of us? We've had our day. But Len! My darling! Just as everything had opened so brightly for him!

Wil. I suppose I'd better offer Linnell the living?

Mrs. W. Yes, perhaps. Wait and see if I can bring him round.

Wil. And if you can't?

Mrs. W. [*Resolutely.*] We must face it out that Linnell has made a terrible mistake, and get him out of the place as soon as we can.

Wil. [*Dubiously.*] Ye—es. I do trust we shall be able to avoid making many false statements. And especially any that can be tested!

Mrs. W. If only the girl herself will say that Linnell is mistaken! [*Listening.*] Hush!

She withdraws from door, as LINNELL re-enters from back.

Mrs. W. How is the patient now?

Lin. She's a little delirious.

Mrs. W. Does she support your accusation?

Lin. I've not questioned her further.

Mrs. W. Then I must. [*Attempting to go off at back.*

Lin. She'll be passing through here on her way upstairs. You can judge then whether you ought to put any painful questions to her to-night.

Mrs. W. Of course, I won't distress her, poor thing! It's easy to see how your mistake arose.

Lin. My mistake?

Mrs. W. You told the girl's story to Lennard. He naturally expressed pity, and you misunderstood him——

Lin. [*Very sternly.*] Mrs. Wilmore, I have made no mistake, no misunderstanding. Please don't think I shall allow that suggestion to pass for one moment.

Mrs. W. You seem determined to take up an attitude of antagonism——

Wil. Yes, Linnell, you might at least listen to what we propose.

Lin. Forgive me. What do you propose?

Wil. That depends upon whether you wish to remain in Weybury, and work cordially with me for the welfare of the parish.

Lin. Certainly I do. What has that to do with this?

Wil. It's all part of the same general question. Come now! Why not sink your own opinions on minor matters?

Lin. What are minor matters? This poor girl in the next room—your son's marriage with Miss Plugenet—are they minor matters?

Wil. Well, frankly, I own I have been too severe at times. For instance, William Sheldrake and Sarah Piper. If I were to leave them entirely in your hands——

Lin. And do you?

Wil. Yes, provided you take care my well-known principles don't suffer too much. You won't give me away, eh?

Lin. I've only one rule in these cases—the utmost condemnation for the sin—the utmost mercy for the sinner.

Wil. Well, that's my own rule, to a great extent. Now, can't we act on that rule all round?

Lin. Tell me exactly what you mean.

Wil. Mr. Daubeney is leaving Weybury——

Lin. Yes?

Mrs. W. We should like to give you the living——

Wil. Four hundred and fifty a year, and the vicarage, if——

Lin. If?

Mrs. W. If we could be assured of your co-operation in *all* things.

Wil. On that distinct understanding, the living is yours. You accept it, of course?

Lin. No.

Wil. No?

Lin. Not on the distinct understanding that you hire my hands and tongue to your service in the affair of this girl.

Wil. What do you mean, sir? How dare you impute motives to me?

Lin. I beg your pardon. Then you offer me the living quite independently of Miss Neve and your son?

Wil. Of course we do.

Lin. I accept it. Thank you with all my heart.

Wil. At the same time, we must know—eh, Charlotte?

Mrs. W. We must know whether you mean to repeat this accusation against Lennard, or whether you'll help us avoid a scandal.

Lin. Certainly I'll help you avoid a scandal. Not one unnecessary word shall ever pass my lips. But Miss Plugenet? What about her?

Mrs. W. I know it's dreadful, but what can we do?

Lin. Be absolutely frank and truthful with her. Let her decide whether she loves your son well enough to forgive him. In that case I won't say a word; except that I cannot marry them.

Mrs. W. You cannot marry them?

Lin. I cannot.

Mrs. W. But if you refuse—she is suspicious already—she'll guess—she'll break off——

Wil. You see, Charlotte, the man's impossible. [*To LINNELL.*] I withdraw my offer of the living.

Lin. I have already refused it—at your price.

Wil. Price? Price? Really! I'm accused of bribery now! Upon my word!

Mrs. W. Hush! We must know exactly what Mr. Linnell suspects about Lennard.

Lin. I suspect nothing. I know.

Mrs. W. What do you propose should be done?

Lin. I can see only one thing clearly. You must tell Miss Plugenet.

Mrs. W. I can't. It would be fatal.

Wil. The worst of cruelty—to shatter a poor girl's happiness, just before her marriage.

Lin. And this other poor girl—in there?

Mrs. W. We'll do all we can for her. You surely don't wish to destroy my son's career?

Wil. A fine young fellow like that! Anxious to serve his country in Parliament, or any other way! Come, Linnell, act up to your own principles! The utmost mercy to the sinner, eh? Look over it! Youthful folly and impulse, eh?

Mrs. W. Mr. Linnell, my son has made one great error. Don't ruin him for life. I'm ready to do any thing for you and yours! We are absolutely in your hands! I beg you, I implore you—you have children of your own—if it were your own child! Save my Lennard! Please, save my boy!

Lin. Save him yourself! Save him by telling the truth! There's no other way! If I were to hush this up, mightn't I be doing him the greatest mischief, the greatest wrong? In a month he is to marry Miss Plugenet. Some months after that, this other girl will bear him a child! If it should all come out——!

Mrs. W. It needn't! It won't! It shan't!

Lin. Sooner or later it must. Then Miss Plugenet is settling a great estate upon him. She gives him all — for what? For all his love and faithfulness! If you let him marry her, won't you really cheat her?

Wil. Cheat?

Lin. Cheat! Did you catch the word?

Mrs. W. But if Miss Plugenet knows, it means Lennard's ruin.

Lin. And what does this other mean? Think! They enter into their new home of marriage—your son and his bride—all bright, and sweet, and clean to live in, as she thinks. She goes a bride to her new home, and then one day she finds this carcass, this dead rat festering under the boards, putrefying there and poisoning all the home! You won't do it! You daren't!

You daren't let your son do it! Save him from it!
Save him by telling the truth!

[MRS. WILMORE *turns from him with a gesture of angry and contemptuous impatience, then subdues herself.*

Mrs. W. [Cold, resolute.] Is that all you have to say?

Lin. [The same cold, resolute tone.] Miss Plugenet must be told.

Mrs. W. I must see this girl. You say yourself she doesn't confirm this story?

Lin. No, but your son does.

Mrs. W. Indeed, he does not.

Lin. He won't dare deny it.

Mrs. W. He will, most emphatically.

[*Going off at back, opens the door.*

Lin. One moment. Miss Plugenet is coming to me to-morrow morning.

Mrs. W. [Coming back.] What for?

Lin. To ask me this question—whether I can conscientiously advise her to marry your son.

[MRS. WILMORE *is overwhelmed for the moment.* MRS. LINNELL and MRS. BLANEY *enter at the front door, and are seen to pass the window in passage.*

Mrs. W. [Recovering herself.] And you'll tell her this absurd story?

Lin. No, you'll tell her yourself.

Mrs. W. [Struck by the idea.] Yes, indeed, I shall. I shall certainly tell her; and warn her of this trumped-up accusation you're bringing against Lenard.

Lin. Trumped-up accusation?!

MRS. LINNELL *appears at door.*

Mrs. L. [Entering.] Is anything the matter? I've just met Mrs. Blaney.

MRS. BLANEY *appears at back.*

Mrs. B. [*Coming in.*] I came across to see how this young person is, but if you're discussing anything private—— [*Looking round suspiciously.*

Mrs. W. Oh, no. Mr. Linnell has got another— what shall we say—another bee in his bonnet!

Lin. What?!

Mrs. L. Edgar!

Mrs. W. [*To MRS. LINNELL.*] Try to make him see how wrong and foolish he is, how cruel to you and your children.

[*She crosses passage, and enters study, closing door behind her.*

Mrs. L. Edgar! Mr. Wilmore, what has my husband done?

Wil. I consented to look over our little differences, and I offered him the living.

Lin. Ah, you offered it to me! What for?

Wil. To extend your sphere of usefulness.

Lin. You mean, to shut my lips!

Wil. [*To MRS. LINNELL and MRS. BLANEY.*] You see! Instead of thanking me, he accuses me of cheating, and bribery, and he brings some utterly ridiculous charge against my son.

Mrs. L. Edgar! [*To WILMORE.*] He doesn't mean it! I'm sure he doesn't! Edgar, if you have any love for me and your children——

Lin. [*Very gentle, his hand upon her head.*] If I have any love for you and my children——

Mrs. L. [*Withdrawing from his caress.*] Then ask Mr. Wilmore's pardon.

Lin. Ask his pardon? for speaking the truth?

[*MRS. LINNELL turns away from him.*

Mrs. B. But what is this charge he brings against Mr. Lennard Wilmore?

Re-enter MRS. WILMORE from study, and across the passage.

Mrs. W. Miss Neve is a little feverish, but I think she may be safely moved. The girl is putting on her things, and I'll take her to Gilminster myself.

Lin. Miss Neve will not leave my house to-night.

Mrs. W. Mr. Linnell, this young lady utterly denies the charge you have brought against her and Lennard. She has placed herself in my care, and I will be responsible for her from this time.

Lin. [*Very firmly.*] Miss Neve will not leave my house to-night.

RACHEL, in outdoor clothes, supported by PATTY, has entered across passage from study. She is excited, feverish, and a little delirious.

Rach. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] I'm ready. [*To LINNELL.*] Thank you for all your kindness, but I must go to Gilminster! You were quite mistaken! That letter wasn't to Mr. Wilmore. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] I told him it was all his mistake.

Mrs. W. Of course it was all his mistake. Are you ready?

Rach. I never said a word about Mr. Wilmore—not a word. You believe me, don't you?

[*She drops exhausted into the chair near door.*]

Mrs. W. Yes. [*To PATTY.*] Give her your arm, and help me take her to the station.

Lin. Mrs. Wilmore, whatever happens, this lady will not leave my house to-night. Look! How dare you ask it?! [*To RACHEL.*] Take my arm. Mary, help me! Mary, are you on my side, or will you go against me too?

Mrs. L. [*Distracted.*] Oh, I don't know what to do!

Lin. Yes, you do know! You've known me all these years. Have I ever asked you to do what wasn't

right? Trust me! I'm in the right now. I'm on God's side, be sure. My wife, stand by me! stand by me!

Mrs. L. Oh, I must! I will!

Lin. Help me here. She must stay with us for the present.

[MRS. LINNELL and LINNELL support RACHEL, and help her to the stairs, open the door and take her up.]

Wil. Linnell, I can't allow this matter to rest.

Lin. [*Helping RACHEL upstairs.*] Stir it up then! Stir it up!

Wil. Will you withdraw this monstrous charge against my son, and own your mistake?

Lin. [*On the stairs.*] No, not for a bishopric!

[LINNELL and MRS. LINNELL are seen helping RACHEL upstairs as the Curtain goes down.]

Ten days pass between Acts II and III.



ACT III.

SCENE: *The library at the Manor House, Weybury. A room in the same house, and in the same style of architecture as Act I.*

A door at back leading into passage. A door up left. A fireplace with fire burning down left. A window right, looking into garden. A sofa facing audience above the fireplace. A table below sofa and a little to the right of it. A table towards the right. A table up near the right corner of room. The walls are mainly covered with bookshelves reaching up high, the books being mostly in good old leather binding, such as would remain in an English gentleman's library of the last century; there are a few modern books. On the table in the right corner are stacks of books. On the table below the sofa are pens, ink and paper. There are the usual library implements and belongings: a globe; a large map over the fireplace; an old Chippendale clock on the shelf of fireplace; rulers, and a bust or two; one or two old family portraits round the room, above the doors.

MRS. WILMORE *enters, left, very quickly and apprehensively, looking back and beckoning to MR. VIVEASH, who enters, cautiously closing the door behind him. MRS. WILMORE'S manner throughout the Act is restless, and betrays great strain and anxiety, except when she is in the presence of others, and is nerving herself to efforts of self-control.*

Mrs. Wilmore. [*Anxiously.*]



ELL? Has she come?

Vive. [*Nods.*] Just arrived at my office. I've boxed her up in my private room.

Mrs. W. She accepts our offer?

Vive. I haven't spoken to her yet.

Mrs. W. We must get it all settled before she meets Sir John Plugenet. He's pressing to see her, and he wishes Linnell, and Lennard, and the Blaneys to be present.

Vive. That's what I've come about. We're on very ticklish ground. We must pick our steps very, very carefully.

Mrs. W. Yes, but Lennard must be cleared, and this girl got out of the way.

Vive. When did you see her last?

Mrs. W. Yesterday.

Vive. At her lodgings in Gilminster?

Mrs. W. Yes. I've been over nearly every day.

Vive. Linnell hasn't seen her?

Mrs. W. Not since Dr. Blaney and I took her away from his house, the morning after the upset there.

Vive. You're sure?

Mrs. W. Quite. He went over, but Dr. Blaney and I left strict orders he was not to be admitted.

Vive. Where is this meeting with Sir John to take place?

Mrs. W. At your office—or better have it here. It will look as if we were not afraid.

Vive. Yes, but Miss Plugenet?

Mrs. W. Helen isn't with us now. When her father returned, she went home with him to the Court.

Vive. Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. How's Miss Plugenet taking it?

Mrs. W. She feels it very keenly. She'd arranged to consult Linnell the next morning. I've had the greatest difficulty in keeping her away from him.

Now she has left it entirely in her father's hands. Do let us get it over as soon as possible.

Vive. [*Dubiously.*] Ye—es. I must see my way clear.

Mrs. W. You frighten me! Isn't it clear?

Vive. Quite, so far. [*With a cunning look of understanding.*] You assure me that Lennard is innocent, and that Linnell has made a silly mistake. I take your word, of course. The girl herself also declares that Lennard is innocent. You're sure she'll stick to that?

Mrs. W. Yes, I think I've warned her it's the only chance of our providing for her and her child. You'd better warn her too.

Vive. [*Shakes his head.*] No, I mustn't go behind her statement.

Mrs. W. What do you mean?

Vive. If the girl will stick to her story, I'm ready to go on. But before I come on the scene you'd better see her again, and put the final screw on her.

Mrs. W. Very well. If you think it necessary.

Vive. I do. She seems strange and bewildered. You're going to subject her to a tremendous ordeal. Suppose she were to break down before Sir John!

Mrs. W. She mustn't! She shan't!

Vive. [*Shakes his head dubiously.*] We're hanging on her single word. If she fails us, she lets us into a horrible hole.

Mrs. W. [*Sits down wearily.*] I don't think I can stand this strain much longer.

Vive. Courage! Courage!

Mrs. W. You won't desert us?

Vive. I'll go as far as I dare, professionally. Perhaps a little further. I'm in the same boat with you. If your mortgagees close, I shall find myself in a very tight place.

Enter at back WILMORE, a little excited.

Wil. Sir John has just driven over with Helen. Are you quite ready to see him?

Mrs. W. [*Rising, bracing herself.*] Yes.

Enter GOODYER at back, announcing SIR JOHN PLUGENET. Enter SIR JOHN PLUGENET, a handsome, well-built, English gentleman of fifty, healthy, frank, genial, pleasant, strong, resolute. Exit GOODYER.

Sir J. How d'ye do, Mrs. Wilmore?

[Shaking hands.]

Mrs. W. My dear Sir John!

Sir J. How are you, Viveash?

Vive. Capital, thanks.

Mrs. W. I hope Helen isn't still fretting about this stupid mistake of Mr. Linnell's?

Sir J. She is worrying a little.

Mrs. W. Oh, we shall easily put it right.

Sir J. [*Firmly.*] We must put it right. How's the girl?

Mrs. W. Recovering slowly.

Sir J. Still at Gilminster, I suppose?

Mrs. W. No; she came over to Weybury this morning.

Sir J. She's in Weybury now?

Mrs. W. Yes. As Lennard's name has been dragged in, I thought Mr. Viveash ought to see her, so she's now at his office.

Sir J. What do you make of this business, Viveash?

Vive. Our friend Linnell has been moonraking in dirty waters, and has fished up this bag of moonshine.

Sir J. Rather dirty, foggy moonshine, eh? Well, we must dispel it. I'll come to your office, and see the girl myself.

[*MR. and MRS. WILMORE show alarm, which SIR JOHN, who has turned to VIVEASH, does not see.*

Vive. Yes—hadn't I better get all the threads together for you?

Sir J. Threads? What do you mean?

Vive. We may as well thrash this out thoroughly——

Sir J. [*Firmly.*] That's what I mean to do.

Vive. I'll see Linnell, and the Blaneys, and the girl herself, and arrange a meeting, and let you know.

Sir J. Why not this morning, now I'm in Weybury?

Vive. By all means, if you wish it.

Sir J. I do. The sooner we bring this parson to book, the better, eh, Mrs. Wilmore?

Mrs. W. Oh, pray let us get this tiresome business over, and go on with the wedding.

Wil. Certainly. Not that anyone who knows me would believe that a son of mine—still, I owe it to my position to silence this slander at the earliest moment.

Vive. We'll silence it this morning. What time will suit you, Sir John?

Sir J. [*Looking at his watch.*] I'm driving Helen across to the Oakleys. I can drop her, and be back here at twelve.

Vive. Twelve. I'll have everything and everybody here ready for you.

Sir J. Do. There's a good fellow! Extraordinary affair! You say Lennard did know this girl in Scotland?

Mrs. W. Oh yes.

Sir J. What sort of terms were they on?

Mrs. W. Sir John, if I tell you something in absolute confidence——

Sir J. You know you can trust me.

Mrs. W. There were two or three young fellows down there making this railway. One of them went to South Africa. When it became necessary for Miss Neve to know his present address, she naturally came to his old chum to find out.

Sir J. I see.

Mrs. W. I had to drag this out of Lennard. He's a dear, loyal fellow. He'd rather lie under an unjust

suspicion himself than betray his chum. You understand?

Sir J. Ah, yes.

Mrs. W. I may rely you'll never make use of this?

Sir J. Of course not. Well, that partly explains—but why should this parson stick to his stupid blunder?

Mrs. W. The man's a fanatic!

Wil. A harebrained, cantankerous fanatic! Wants to dump down model public-houses all over the country, and ruin the brewers.

Vive. Poor Linnell is a moral maniac, who will some day discover that the world is square, because he professes rectilinear principles.

Mrs. W. Hush!

As HELEN and LENNARD enter at back.

Hel. [*Goes affectionately to MRS. WILMORE.*] Good morning, dear. [*Kissing her.*]

Mrs. W. How are you, dear?

Hel. How d'ye do, Mr. Viveash?

Vive. Good morning.

Hel. You're talking about Mr. Linnell. I want you to give me back my promise, and let me see him.

Mrs. W. My dear, you've left this entirely in your father's hands. If you see Mr. Linnell now, it will be going over to the enemy.

Hel. I can't think of Mr. Linnell as an enemy.

Sir J. Lennard, you see Nell is fretting. I needn't ask you—

Hel. [*Goes very quickly to LENNARD.*] No, you needn't ask him! Len, I love you, and I will trust you. I do trust you entirely!

[LENNARD *takes her hand, kisses it warmly.*]

Wil. There's a noble girl for you! My dear Helen, I'm proud of you! I feel my dear boy's happiness will be safe in your keeping.

Hel. Don't let us speak another word of this hateful thing. But when my father has cleared it up, I want

you all to be very kind to Mr. Linnell. He's not to be punished.

Wil. I must say I hope his conscience won't spare him!

Hel. Whatever mistake he has made, I'm sure he is acting honestly.

Vive. That's a bad excuse for setting houses on fire!

Sir J. Now, Nell, I'll just drop you at the Oakleys. We must hurry on. *[Looking at his watch.*

Hel. Good-bye, Mrs. Wilmore. *[Kissing her.*

Mrs. W. Good-bye, dear.

Hel. Good-bye, Mr. Wilmore.

Wil. Good-bye, my daughter that is to be!

[Shaking hands, is about to kiss her, but she makes as if she did not see it.

Hel. Come and put me in the dogcart, Len.

[Exit at back, followed by LENNARD.

Wil. What a noble girl, Plugenet! What a noble girl!

Sir J. At twelve o'clock here, Viveash.

Vive. At twelve o'clock.

Sir J. Au revoir.

[Exit SIR JOHN at back. WILMORE closes the door after him. WILMORE, MRS. WILMORE, and VIVEASH stand looking at each other. At length VIVEASH takes out his watch.

Vive. There's no time to waste. I'll call and tell the Blaneys to be here. They're safe?

Mrs. W. Oh yes, they're on our side.

Wil. They ought to be. I got Blaney appointed public vaccinator.

Vive. *[To MRS. WILMORE.]* You'd better have one more dig at Linnell, and persuade him he's mistaken, eh!

Wil. He's an obstinate beast! In fact, as you very justly observed, Linnell's really a maniac.

Vive. He's certainly guilty of the criminal lunacy

of not knowing on which side his bread is buttered.

Wil. If he won't listen to reason, what then?

Mrs. W. Crush him! Either my Lennard has to go down, or this man. If he won't retract, crush him! Crush him! Crush him!

Vive. I'll send him on to you. [*Going up to back.*]

Wil. [*Very anxiously.*] Viveash, we shall pull through this?

Vive. [*Looks dubious, shrugs his shoulders.*] It all depends on the girl. If you can't get her as tight as wax——

Wil. Well?

Vive. Then, for heaven's sake, draw back, and pull yourselves out of it as best you can!

Mrs. W. We can't draw back now!

Wil. It would be worse than telling the truth at first.

Vive. I'll bring her along to you. Get her as tight as wax, or——

[*Makes a significant gesture, and exit at back.*]

Wil. This is a nice position for a man with my honourable record! Throughout my whole life, I've never had to do so much violence to my conscience.

Mrs. W. Oh, strangle that conscience!

Wil. Strangle my conscience?! Upon my word! I don't believe women have any moral principles at all!

Mrs. W. We haven't—when it comes to saving those we love. There's where we tower above you little creatures! Now will you help me save Lennard?

Wil. I'm doing all I can. You must own all through these painful circumstances I've preserved a high moral tone to everybody——

Mrs. W. You overdo it. If you don't take care your moral principles will ruin us.

Wil. Really, Charlotte! Upon my word! [*He is going off at back, and turns.*] That case of Sheldrake

and Sarah Piper has come up again. I'd better let him off, eh?

Mrs. W. No, you'd better preserve your high moral tone with him—at least till this is over!

Wil. Very well. It will prove that I do act up to my principles as a general rule.

Mrs. W. Yes! We all act up to our principles when it costs us nothing!

Wil. Upon my word, Charlotte! I will not endure these constant insinuations that I am——

Mrs. W. What?

Wil. That I am—a—no better than I should be!

[LENNARD enters, sulky, dejected, self-contemptuous, throws himself into a chair. WILMORE watches him with growing anger, and when LENNARD is seated, bursts out furiously.]

Wil. This is all your doing, sir! I bring you up in the strictest path! I set before you an example that any son might be proud to copy, and instead of walking in my footsteps, you bring this hussy here——

Mrs. W. Will you cease? Will you cease? And remember that I *know* you! [WILMORE fires up and is about to speak.] I tell you, I know you!

[WILMORE goes out at back, silenced and abashed.]

Mrs. W. [Goes to LENNARD and throws her arms round him.] Oh Len! Len! [She bursts into tears.]

Len. My poor darling! Don't cry! Mother, it's a thundering shame you've got to do this for me! What a dirty cad I've been!

Mrs. W. Hush! Oh, Len, if I can only save you! And I will!

Len. I'm not worth saving! I'm only worth kicking! What a howling skunk I felt just now when Helen stuck by me!

Mrs. W. Don't talk like that! You've done no worse than others, only it has come to light! Sir John

is coming! You'll be questioned.—You'll say just what I've told you?

Len. Yes, I've got it all ready.

Mrs. W. Remember, it's all your future! You won't fail?

Len. No, I won't fail, dear. I can see what a plucky fight you're making, and it's all for me! Well, I'm going to back you up. You make dead sure of that, you best mother that ever lived! Whatever comes of it, I'm going to back you up through thick and thin.

[Giving her his hand.]

Mrs. W. You're my own son! *[Kissing him passionately.]* Now I'm brave again! We shall win, Len! We shall win!

Enter GOODYER, announcing MR. LINNELL. Enter LINNELL, looking ill and more haggard than before, but with a look of desperate determination on his face.

Mrs. W. Good morning.

Lin. Good morning.

Len. Good morning, Linnell.

Lin. Good morning. *[To MRS. WILMORE.]* Mr. Viveash says you wish to see me?

Mrs. W. Yes. Lennard, you needn't wait.

Lin. *[Stopping him.]* Yes, please—one moment. You know I've no wish to discover your fault. I'd willingly bury it. But I can't bury the consequences. You can't bury the consequences. Come then, face them like a man.

[LINNELL has put his hand on LENNARD'S shoulder. LENNARD tries to shuffle uneasily away from him.]

Len. Upon my soul, Linnell, I don't understand a word of what you're talking about!

[About to go off left, but LINNELL, who has one hand on one shoulder, claps the other hand on the other shoulder, and turns LENNARD round face to face with him.]

Lin. [*Very sternly.*] You don't understand? You shall! You've behaved like a scoundrel to one poor girl! You've wrecked her life, and you're leaving her to bear her shame and despair alone! You mean to behave like a scoundrel to another, who has given you all her love and faith, and all her estate! And your mother is helping you!

Mrs. W. [*Indignant.*] Mr. Linnell!

Lin. [*Repeats, looking fixedly at MRS. WILMORE.*] Your mother is helping you! The mother loves her son, and she helps him build his house on this filthy bog of deceit! You can't do it! Your house will tumble on your heads! When I meet Sir John Plugenet, I must tell him the truth! I must show you a seducer! Don't force me to show you a coward and a liar into the bargain! Do you understand me now? Have I spoken plainly?

[LENNARD *has shown some uneasiness, but he nerves himself, gets away from LINNELL'S grasp, and laughs at him contemptuously.*

Len. [*Laughing contemptuously at LINNELL.*] My good Linnell, have you still got that bee in your bonnet?

[*Exit left, with a little contemptuous laugh at LINNELL.*

Lin. Then you take your stand upon your lie? So be it! I'll be here at twelve to meet Sir John Plugenet.

[*Going off at back. MRS. WILMORE has shown impatience and rage at LINNELL'S words to LENNARD, but with a great effort she controls herself, and speaks with outward calm, which, however, betrays suppressed anger and determination.*

Mrs. W. Mr. Linnell—one moment. [LINNELL *comes down.*] As you seem determined to rake out this mare's nest——

Lin. Mare's nest?!

Mrs. W. Perhaps we'd better leave metaphors, and look at the plain facts.

Lin. Will you? Dare you?

Mrs. W. There's no evidence to connect Lennard with this girl. You haven't one single particle of proof.

Lin. Well?

Mrs. W. Sir John and Miss Plugenet fully accept our explanation. You'll merely waste your time in trying to convince them. You'll only prove yourself a more obstinate and misguided fanatic than people already think you.

Lin. People think me an obstinate and misguided fanatic?

Mrs. W. Didn't you know it?

Lin. No! How strange! And I thought myself just a plain, ordinary, honest man!

Mrs. W. After this inquiry is ended, you will leave Weybury with the reputation of having started a malicious slander against one of your parishioners. Mr. Daubeney cannot possibly recommend you to another curacy. Your career will be ended. You will go down——

Lin. Let me go down! If the truth is to go down, let me go down with it! I couldn't wish a better end!

Mrs. W. Ah! You're seeking martyrdom! I'm afraid you'll find it! What will become of your children?

Lin. They will be catered for—like the sparrows.

Mrs. W. Very much like the sparrows, I should say; with crumbs of charity, and what they can pick up on the roadside. Why won't you be sensible? I offer you one last chance. If you refuse, think what your children's future must be!

Lin. Beggary! Beggary! I know it! But faith and truthfulness with it! That's a good legacy after all! You can't match it! Just think what your child's future must be! Lies! Lies! And nothing but lies! You won't do it! You'll draw back. I offer you one last chance. Come out of this refuge of lies——

Mrs. W. [*Rises, impatient and indignant.*] My good

man, it's simply useless to talk further. [*She goes away a step or two and then comes back to him.*] You're determined to ruin Lennard?

Lin. I think you're determined to ruin me. Isn't that so?

Mrs. W. Yes! If you drive me to it. And I shall be merciless. Do you understand?

Lin. I understand.

Mrs. W. There is no more to be said.

VIVEASH cautiously puts his head in door left.

Vive. You've finished with Mr. Linnell?

Mrs. W. Quite. He persists in this story, and——

[*Shrugs her shoulders.*]

Vive. Nonsense. Come, Linnell, you're not so mad as to stick to——

Lin. I'm so mad as to stick to the truth. Take me on that level, please.

[*VIVEASH stands nonplussed for a moment, and exchanges a look with MRS. WILMORE.*]

Vive. Very well. Sir John Plugenet has instructed me to collect all the particulars of this affair. Would you mind making your statement to me?

Lin. Certainly. In writing?

Vive. Oh, no. This little inquiry is quite informal. Suppose we have five minutes together in the garden, and see if we can throw some light on this plaguey business?

Lin. [*Looking from one to the other.*] You're acting for Mrs. Wilmore in this?

Vive. Yes.

Lin. Is it light she wants? [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] Is it light you want? Or dust and darkness? Ask her!

[*Exit at back. MRS. WILMORE and VIVEASH look at each other with some alarm.*]

Vive. Confounded righteous, stiff-necked beggar! [*Pointing off left.*] The girl's in there. You must nail her! [*Exit after LINNELL.*]

Mrs. W. [*Goes to door left, opens it, and speaks off.*] Will you come here, please?

Enter RACHEL in out-of-doors clothes. She is still looking pale and ill, her manner is frightened and subdued, and she limps a little.

Mrs. W. [*Shakes hands.*] Good morning, dear.

Rach. Good morning.

Mrs. W. Now, my dear, Sir John Plugenet will be here soon. He'll question you severely. You won't break down?

Rach. [*Calmly.*] No, I shan't break down.

Mrs. W. [*Looking at her searchingly.*] You're quite sure you won't betray yourself?

Rach. [*Firmly.*] Quite sure.

Mrs. W. Thank you, dear! [*Kissing her.*] I can't tell how deeply I feel for you in all this. But it will soon be over now.

Rach. [*Seated at table, left.*] If I do this, I may see Lennard sometimes?

Mrs. W. I'm afraid that's impossible. Mr. Viveash and I think it advisable you should not live in England.

Rach. Then I shall never see Lennard again! Won't he wish ever to see me?

Mrs. W. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be wise. He will have his duty to society.

Rach. But won't he want to know what has become of me? And I love him so! I love him now more than ever! Didn't he send me any message?

Mrs. W. He begs you to do this for his sake.

Rach. He begs me?

Mrs. W. Yes. You will?

Rach. Yes, of course. But won't he wish to know what has become of—of his child? If I should die! Then it would grow up without a mother, and perhaps be cruelly treated, and have no one to teach it to do what is right. [*With sudden passion.*] That would be dreadful! I know I've done wrong myself, but I want my child to do what is right! And—if I should die—wouldn't Lennard wish to see his

child—never see his child—never know how it is brought up—

Mrs. W. If anything should happen to you, I promise you I'll look after the child myself.

Rach. Yes—but Lennard—won't he care? Oh!

[*MRS. WILMORE makes a gesture of despair.*]

Mrs. W. My dear, you must give up Lennard absolutely from this time or you must expose and ruin him.

Rach. [*Quickly.*] You know I wouldn't do that! I'll do whatever you wish.

VIVEASH re-enters, looking harassed and disconcerted.

Mrs. W. [*Goes to him.*] Well?

[*VIVEASH shakes his head, and shrugs his shoulders, looks at RACHEL, and then inquiringly at MRS. WILMORE.*]

Mrs. W. Miss Neve is quite ready to meet Sir John Plugenet. She says there isn't the least truth in Mr. Linnell's slander. She had only the slightest acquaintance with Lennard in Scotland. Isn't that so, dear?

Rach. Yes.

Vive. In that case, we can very soon settle the whole matter. You'd better write a little note to Mrs. Wilmore putting that in so many words. Pens, ink and paper? Here we are!

[*Seating himself at table left, near RACHEL, putting paper and ink in front of her, offering her a pen.*]

Rach. What must I say?

Vive. When you were in Scotland last spring, you became deeply attached to a gentleman—who promised you marriage?

Rach. Yes.

Vive. We needn't mention his name—call him Mr. X. That gentleman was not Mr. Lennard Wilmore? [*RACHEL looks at him, but does not speak.*]

Mrs. W. It was not my son?

Rach. No.

Vive. Begin your letter by saying that.

Rach. But won't that be perjury?

Vive. My dear young lady, you've just stated to Mrs. Wilmore and me that Mr. Lennard Wilmore was not—Mr. X. You also made that statement in the presence of Mrs. Blaney and Mrs. Linnell in Mr. Linnell's house. It will be perjury if you draw back now.

Rach. I won't draw back. But you won't send me out of England—away from him? I can't go!

[*Breaking down, sobbing a little.*]

Vive. Come! Come! We mustn't get tearful! Everything will be arranged for your comfort.

Rach. [*Looking from one to the other.*] That means you will send me out of England. You'll let me see Lennard before I go?

Vive. But you say Mr. Lennard Wilmore is the merest acquaintance.

Rach. [*Wildly.*] You know, you know what he is to me!

[*MRS. WILMORE makes a gesture of despair to VIVEASH.*]

Mrs. W. Sir John will be here. Tell her nothing can be done for her unless Lennard is cleared from this.

Rach. You needn't fear! I shall clear him! But afterwards, I may see him once, just for a few minutes? Oh, do let me! I won't make a scene. Just once!

[*VIVEASH and MRS. WILMORE look at each other. MRS. WILMORE nods.*]

Vive. I see no harm in your having one short interview with Mr. Lennard Wilmore.

Rach. Oh, thank you!

Vive. At my office—with certain precautions.

Rach. Thank you very much. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] Thank you.

Vive. Come! Time presses! The letter!

[*Again pushing paper towards her.*]

Rach. Tell me exactly what to say, and I'll say it.

Mrs. W. Mr. Viveash, can't you draft out something?

Vive. I'd rather leave her quite free to make her own statement, in her own words.

Mrs. W. I'll put it into her own words, and see that she copies it.

Vive. Oh, very well. [*Writes hurriedly.*] I believe it has been arranged that a suitable provision shall be made for Miss Neve's future. Has any amount been named?

Mrs. W. No.

Vive. [*Always writing.*] To prevent any future misunderstanding it would be better to fix the exact amount.

Mrs. W. My dear, what do you think?

Rach. [*Hopeless.*] I don't mind. It doesn't matter.

Mrs. W. But please say. We wish to behave quite handsomely to you. What sum yearly would make you quite happy and comfortable?

Rach. Whatever you please. But I am to see Lenard—just once—before I go?

Enter GOODYER at back, announcing MR. DAUBENY.

Enter DAUBENY. Exit GOODYER.

Daub. Good morning, my very dear friend!

[*Shaking hands with MRS. WILMORE.*

Mrs. W. Good morning.

Daub. [*Bows very slightly to RACHEL, who slightly returns it.*] Good morning, Viveash.

Vive. [*Always writing.*] Good morning.

[*During the following scene MRS. WILMORE and DAUBENY are at table, right; VIVEASH and RACHEL are at table, left.*

Daub. I met Sir John, and he asked me to—a—but—[*glancing at RACHEL*] I'm intruding?

Mrs. W. Mr. Viveash, would you rather finish that in the next room?

Vive. [*Writing.*] I've just finished.

Daub. You're sure? Because—[*Glancing again at RACHEL, who sits pale and self-absorbed.*] Oh, by the way, Mrs. Wilmore, my dear wife has just posted you an invitation for our dinner party. We've fixed it for the second. Are you free on that date?

Mrs. W. Yes, I think.

Daub. Oh, you really must be free, there's a sweet lady! We're so anxious to get just exactly the right people, and to have everything go off well.

Vive. [*Passing paper over to RACHEL.*] I think that is precisely the statement you wish to make? Read it over. [*RACHEL reads over what VIVEASH has written*

Daub. [*In a low aside to MRS. WILMORE.*] I suppose that is the young person?

Mrs. W. Yes.

Daub. Poor soul! Sir John insisted on my being present, but really in these tiresome, unpleasant affairs—Oh, yes—now whom would you like to take you in to dinner? The Bishop?

Mrs. W. I don't care.

Daub. Very well, I shall bestow you on the Bishop. [*Looking at her.*] Rather dry, our good Bishop, eh? He's a great Orientalist. I'll send you his brochure on the new gospel.

Mrs. W. [*Always watching VIVEASH and RACHEL.*] New gospel? What new gospel?

Daub. Haven't you heard? Somebody has just discovered a valuable new gospel, with quite new readings, in a Syrian monastery. Our good Bishop dabbles a great deal in apocryphal gospels. Now I take a more practical view of Christianity.

[*VIVEASH has been conferring with RACHEL upon the paper he has written. MRS. WILMORE has been keenly watching.*

Vive [*Rising.*] Is that right?

Rach. Yes.

Vive. Mrs. Wilmore, if you please.

[*MRS. WILMORE goes down to them, and*

VIVEASH *just shows her the paper, and whispers instructions, pointing to the other room.* RACHEL *sits pale and distracted.*

Enter GOODYER *at back, announcing, "Doctor and Mrs. Blaney."* *Enter* DR. and MRS. BLANEY.
Exit GOODYER.

Mrs. B. Good morning, Mrs. Wilmore.

Mrs. W. How d'ye do? [*Shaking hands.*]

Mrs. B. How d'ye do, Mr. Daubeny?

Daub. How d'ye do, my dear friend?

[BLANEY *has meantime shaken hands with* MRS. WILMORE, *and nodded to* VIVEASH, *who has nodded in return.* BLANEY *shakes hands with* DAUBENY.

Dr. B. [*To* RACHEL, *very coldly.*] I trust you find yourself so far recovered?

Rach. Yes, thank you.

Mrs. B. [*Looking at* RACHEL.] Mr. Viveash asked us to meet Sir John. Perhaps we're too early? We might wait in another room.

Mrs. W. Oh, no. Please sit down. [*Going to door, left.*] Miss Neve, will you please come this way?

[RACHEL *limps quickly across the room, ashamed, with eyes cast down, and goes off, left,* MRS. BLANEY *watching her fiercely all the time.*]

Mrs. W. I'll be back in a few minutes. [*Exit, left.*]

Mrs. B. I was quite right about that girl. Have you ever noticed, Mr. Daubeny, how that class of person always avoids meeting the glance of a truly good woman?

Daub. Do they now? I've not observed——

Mrs. B. Yes. The doctor's profession bringing him constantly into contact with undesirable persons, I have felt it my duty to share his labours——

Daub. Very charming of you! Quite charming! I'm sure our dear friend appreciates——

Dr. B. [Stiffly.] Mrs. Blaney is an admirable help-meet in many respects.

Mrs. B. And having no home ties of my own——

Dr. B. [Annoyed.] Yes, yes, my dear——

Mrs. B. I have been able to devote myself entirely to the interests of public morality, whereas if Providence had smiled on our union——

Dr. B. We needn't pursue the subject.

Mrs. B. No, but if Providence had seen fit——

Dr. B. My dear Matilda, nothing is to be gained by repining.

Mrs. B. I'm not repining, but while persons like this drawing-mistress are allowed to flaunt their delinquencies——

Daub. Very true! By the way, my dear friend, [*to VIVEASH*] now we're all alone, and all good neighbours, I hope our young friend Lennard hasn't got himself into a very bad mess——

Vive. Oh no!

Daub. Because we don't want any washing of dirty linen, do we? It's so bad for society, gives such a handle to the lower classes, and in these democratic days—now, do tell me, there isn't going to be a scandal? [*Anxiously.*

Vive. Oh no!

Daub. Because I've just sent out the invitations for my first dinner-party in Gilminster, and I've asked the Wilmores and Sir John Plugenet. And if there is to be an exposure—really I don't know what I should do.

Vive. You needn't be alarmed. We shall bring Lennard off with flying colours.

Daub. I'm delighted! Sir John seems bent on fishing things out. You'll be able to satisfy him, eh?

Vive. Well, the girl herself declares that Linnell is absolutely mistaken.

Daub. She does?

Vive. Of course, if it comes to a question of hard swearing, and Linnell says one thing and we say another, then I hope Mrs. Wilmore may rely that her

old friends will rally round her, and see that her version is believed.

Daub. Of course we shall! Linnell came to me with a long rigmarole about a letter that the girl had written to Lennard——

Mrs. B. Yes, quite between ourselves, while I was waiting for the Doctor that night, this young person's things were on the table, and a letter had fallen out of her bag——

Dr. B. [*Warningly.*] My dear!

Vive. [*Quickly.*] Did you see the contents?

Mrs. B. Of course not! But, as it was lying open, I couldn't help catching sight of the word "shame," and——

Dr. B. My dear, I think you must be mistaken.

Vive. Do you intend to say anything about this letter?

[*DR. BLANEY makes her an authoritative gesture to say "No."*]

Mrs. B. Oh no! I shouldn't dream of mentioning it!

Re-enter MRS. WILMORE with a letter in her hand.

Mrs. W. [*To VIVEASH.*] Will you please see what Miss Neve has written? [*Giving him letter.*] It's past twelve. Sir John ought to be here.

Vive. [*Nodding.*] Couldn't be better! I'll take care of it, shall I?

Enter WILMORE at back.

Wil. How d'ye do, Daubeney? [*Shaking hands.*]

Daub. Good morning, my dear friend.

Wil. Mrs. Blaney, how are you?

Mrs. B. How d'ye do? [*Shaking hands.*]

Wil. Ah, Blaney! We meet under very strange circumstances! That a son of mine should be accused of—! And this upstart curate! I hope, Daubeney, that

when he leaves Weybury you'll take care he doesn't annoy us any further?

Daub. Yes. It's a little difficult to know what to do with him. What do you propose?

Wil. I hope he will have the grace to disappear entirely! That is my invariable attitude towards any scoundrel who crosses my path—"Disappear! Clear out of my way! Don't force me to take any further notice of you!"

Daub. An admirable rule!

Enter GOODYER *at back, showing in* SIR JOHN PLUGENET. *Exit* GOODYER.

Sir J. I'm a little late. How do, Blaney?

[*Shaking hands.*]

Dr. B. How are you, Sir John?

Sir J. How are you? [To MRS. BLANEY.]

Mrs. B. Good morning, Sir John.

Sir J. [*Looking round.*] Mr. Linnell is not here?

Wil. Yes, I had him shown into another room until such time as we require him. [*Rings bell.*]

Sir J. We must have Lennard too.

Wil. Lennard is only too anxious to face his traducer.

GOODYER *appears at door at back.*

Wil. Ask Mr. Lennard and Mr. Linnell to come here. [*Exit* GOODYER.]

Sir J. And Miss Neve herself?

Vive. In the next room.

Mrs. W. She's ready to come in at any moment, but I'm sure you'd wish to spare her as far as possible.

Sir J. Certainly.

Vive. Meantime, there is Miss Neve's own statement in her own words. Just cast your eye over that.

[*Giving him the letter* MRS. WILMORE *has brought in,*

Enter LENNARD at back. Throughout the scene he assumes a careless, confident manner, but at moments he betrays intense anxiety and exchanges furtive looks with his mother.

Len. How are you? [To DAUBENY.

Daub. Good morning, my dear young friend.

[*Shaking hands.*

Len. How d'ye do, Mrs. Blaney?

Mrs. B. How d'ye do?

Len. Good morning, Blaney. [Shaking hands.

Sir J. [*Having read the letter.*] But this is positively conclusive.

Vive. I thought you'd say so.

Sir J. What can Mr. Linnell say to this?

Enter GOODYER at back, announcing "Mr. Linnell."

Enter LINNELL. Exit GOODYER. LINNELL bows as he comes in. SIR JOHN, poisoned against him by the WILMORES and VIVEASH, regards him with evident distrust and coldness.

Mrs. W. [*Introducing.*] Mr. Linnell — Sir John Plugenet.

Lin. Good morning, Sir John.

Sir J. [*Very coldly.*] Good morning, sir.

Vive. We may as well come to business at once. Will you be seated?

[DAUBENY, MRS. WILMORE, MRS. BLANEY, DR. BLANEY sit. VIVEASH seats himself, and makes notes all the while.

Vive. Mr. Linnell, I must ask you formally to withdraw certain damaging statements you have made regarding Mr. Lennard Wilmore and Miss Neve.

Wil. And apologize! [A pause.

Sir J. [*Sternly to LINNELL.*] What have you to say, sir?

Lin. [*Glancing round him.*] Nothing.

Sir J. What?! You make this dreadful accusation, and then you run away from it?

Lin. I'm not running away. I'm here.

Sir J. But you've repeated this slander?

Lin. Not to a single person since that night.

Wil. But it's all over the town!

Lin. Not through any word of mine. I've no wish to repeat this story even now—unless you force me.

Sir J. Perhaps, sir, but before you leave this room you must either repeat it, or withdraw it absolutely.

Lin. If you please. Through an accident I became aware of Mr. Lennard Wilmore's fault. I urged him to own the truth to you. I urge him still, I entreat him, with all——

Vive. [*Dry, hard.*] Mr. Linnell, please reserve your sentimental appeals for the pulpit. Sir John wants to get at the facts.

Lin. [*Sharp, dry, hard.*] I'll give them to him.

Sir J. [*Cold, distrustful.*] I shall be obliged.

Lin. While Miss Neve was in my house, a letter she had written tumbled on the floor. Thinking it was addressed to myself, I began to read it. It spoke of the writer's shame and distress——

Vive. But what reason had you for connecting the writer's shame and distress with Mr. Lennard Wilmore?

Lin. It said "I shall call on your mother this afternoon, and——"

Vive. But, you may have observed, other people besides Mr. Lennard Wilmore have mothers.

Lin. Yes, it is customary. [*Advancing a little towards MRS. WILMORE.*] Mothers who bring their sons up to love the truth and hate lies——

Sir J. What? Mr. Linnell! You accuse a lady in Mrs. Wilmore's position!—Viveash, I shall lose my patience.

Vive. Keep calm, Sir John! We shall soon explode this bag of moonshine. [*To LINNELL.*] You're sure

this letter didn't read, "I'll call on your grandmother?"

Lin. No—the girl didn't mock at her agony. Do you?

Vive. What became of this letter?

Lin. Miss Neve burnt it.

Vive. That's a pity. Mrs. Wilmore, will you please ask Miss Neve whether the letter Mr. Linnell picked up was written to your son, and whether it contained any reference whatever to you, or to him?

[MRS. WILMORE goes towards door, left.

Lin. Why ask her? You know she'll say "No."

Mrs. W. Surely Miss Neve must know to whom she wrote that letter. [Exit MRS. WILMORE, left.

Vive. Have you any other evidence against Mr. Lennard Wilmore?

Lin. Yes, his own word.

Len. My word?

Lin. You owned to me you had betrayed this girl under a promise of marriage; and you begged me to hide it!

Len. What? I asked you what bee you'd got in your bonnet!

Wil. A bee in his bonnet! Now that to me exactly describes the situation.

Daub. A very happy phrase! A bee in his bonnet! [Tapping his stomach.

Vive. I suppose what really happened, Lennard, was this—Mr. Linnell told you this poor girl's story; you pitied her, and then he muddled up——

Lin. [Sternly.] Please don't put his lie into his mouth! He has it pat enough!

Wil. Lie! We're using very pretty language now!

Mrs. B. And in the presence of ladies!

Dr. B. Violent language is generally associated with a bad case.

Lin. Yes, and sometimes with a good case, too!

MRS. WILMORE *re-enters door, left.*

Sir J. Lennard, my boy, you are to take my name, and be my son. Tell me—Is there any truth in what Mr. Linnell says?

Len. [*Catches sight of his mother's anxious face, and, after the faintest faltering, says firmly.*] No, not the least.

Sir J. You did not confess you had betrayed this girl?

Len. [*Quite firmly.*] No, Sir John.

[MRS. WILMORE *shows immense relief.*

Sir J. [*Relieved. Shakes his hand cordially.*] I believe you. And now, tell this man to his face that he is——mistaken. He'll know what that means.

[MRS. WILMORE *shows anxiety.*

Len. [*Steps firmly to LINNELL and says fiercely.*] Mr. Linnell, you are mistaken!

[MRS. WILMORE *shows great relief.* LINNELL *flames with resentment, is about to reply, but stops and stares round, growing bewildered, and beginning to realize the hopelessness of his position; at length drops into chair, and buries his face in hands on table.*

Mrs. W. [*Comes forward.*] Miss Neve says most positively that the letter Mr. Linnell picked up was not written to Lennard, and had no reference to him or to me.

Sir J. [*To LINNELL.*] You hear that Miss Neve denies——

Lin. Oh yes, she denies. They all deny! And Mr. and Mrs. Wilmore! Let them deny too! If you please, both of you, deny, deny, deny!

Wil. So we're to be dragged into it! So we knew——

Lin. [*To WILMORE.*] Aye, you knew! For you offered me the living to hold my tongue! [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] And you—you begged me with tears to save your boy. Well, I've done my best to save him! You must go your way and ruin him! Go on and ruin him!

Sir J. [*Struck by the sincerity of LINNELL'S utterance.*] Wilmore—Mrs. Wilmore, surely you didn't beg Mr. Linnell to——

Mrs. W. My dear Sir John, when we got there, we found Mr. Linnell in an excited state—with this bee in his bonnet—his own wife implored him to withdraw his silly statement. Mrs. Blaney, you remember?

Mrs. B. Oh yes. Poor Mrs. Linnell said she was sure he didn't mean it, and told him to beg Mr. Wilmore's pardon.

[LINNELL is overwhelmed. SIR JOHN looks at VIVEASH, who shrugs his shoulders contemptuously.]

Vive. Have you any further evidence to offer us?

[LINNELL, growing more and more bewildered, shakes his head.]

Vive. Sir John, will you please show him Miss Neve's letter to Mrs. Wilmore.

Sir J. Ah, yes! [*Bringing out the letter which VIVEASH has given him.*] Please read that.

Lin. To what end?

Sir J. Please read it. [LINNELL takes the letter, and looks at it mechanically, not trying to understand it.] You see, the girl herself declares Mr. Lennard Wilmore is nothing to her.

Lin. She knows! She knows!

Vive. I'm glad you admit she knows.

Sir J. Well, what have you to say?

Lin. Nothing. [*Giving back the letter.*]

Sir J. Nothing, sir? Nothing?

Lin. [*Suddenly.*] Yes! Please bring Miss Neve here——

Mrs. W. [*Alarmed.*] Sir John, you shall see Miss Neve and question her yourself, but Dr. Blaney will say if she is in a fit state——

Dr. B. I must certainly forbid any violent or distressing scenes. It would be highly dangerous to my patient.

Lin. Then why is she here, if not to get at the

truth? Sir John, for the sake of your daughter's happiness, I demand to ask Miss Neve one question in the presence of your future son-in-law.

Vive. Surely Miss Neve's statement is sufficiently explicit.

Lin. I demand to put them face to face.

Sir J. Mrs. Wilmore, I think we might ask Miss Neve to please step here for a moment.

Mrs. W. If you wish.

[*She just glances at VIVEASH, who just signs assent.*]

Sir J. I do.

Mrs. W. I'll fetch her.

[*MRS. WILMORE goes off left, leaving the door open.*]

Vive. [*To SIR JOHN.*] Sir John, you'll take care Miss Neve is not frightened or brow-beaten?

Sir J. We will treat her with every consideration.

Mrs. W. [*Appears at door, left, looking off.*] If you please——

RACHEL enters very slowly, limping a little, with calm set, determined face, and downcast eyes. She just raises them to meet LENNARD'S glance for an instant.

Mrs. W. This is Sir John Plugenet—Miss Neve.

[*SIR JOHN and RACHEL bow slightly.*]

Lin. Good morning, Miss Neve.

[*He holds out his hand.*]

Rach. Good morning.

[*She just looks at him, does not give her hand at first, but as he holds his out, at length she gives hers. He takes it, holds it, and leads her towards LENNARD.*]

Lin. [*To LENNARD.*] Will you please look at this lady?

Vive. What now?

Lin. [*To RACHEL.*] Will you please look at Mr. Wilmore? I charge you both, as you will answer at that dreadful day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed——

[LENNARD *draws back a little.* RACHEL *also shows a very slight sign of faltering, which she instantly controls.*

Vive. [*Very firmly.*] Sir John, I must protest against this paltry theatrical appeal! Miss Neve has scarcely recovered from her illness——

Lin. If you please, Mr. Viveash! Let me put them to their oath.

Vive. Doctor Blaney! Sir John!

Sir J. Mr. Linnell, will you please stand aside? I'll question Miss Neve myself. [*To RACHEL, very kindly.*] I'm deeply grieved to trouble you. You know my daughter is to be married to this gentleman?

Rach. Yes.

Sir J. Please forgive my asking. Has he ever been more to you than an acquaintance?

Rach. No.

Sir J. Has he ever spoken to you any word of love?

Rach. No.

Sir J. Have you the least claim upon him as a lover?

Rach. No.

Sir J. That is your solemn word—your solemn oath, in the presence of Heaven? You have no claim whatever upon Mr. Lennard Wilmore?

Rach. [*Quite firmly, looking at LENNARD, and then looking at SIR JOHN.*] No, none whatever!

Sir J. Thank you for having spoken out so plainly. That sets the question at rest for ever.

[RACHEL *has answered quite firmly and steadfastly throughout, but at the end she drops back on the sofa a little exhausted.*

Sir J. It has been too much for you?

Rach. No—no—please don't trouble.

Sir J. [*Turns to LINNELL.*] Mr. Linnell, I daren't trust myself to speak to you! You, a clergyman, whose first care it should be to hush all slander and evil speaking——

Wil. Leave this house, sir!

[LINNELL, *bewildered, dazed, looks round, goes up to door at back, dazed.*

Mrs. W. [*As he passes her.*] I told you how this would end.

Lin. It's not ended! [*Suddenly turns at door.*] Sir John, tell your daughter to look! There's a rat under the floor of her new home! [*Sweeping his hand round to WILMORE, MRS. WILMORE, and LENNARD.*] You know it, all of you! You liars! You hypocrites! You time-servers! Damned time-servers! You know it! You know the rat's festering under the floor! [*Coming down to RACHEL.*] You know it too——

[*RACHEL starts up frightened, and staggers.*

VIVEASH and SIR JOHN pull LINNELL away. RACHEL looks round, meets LENNARD'S look, utters a cry, rushes past him, but staggers, falls as she is passing by him. He instinctively catches her in his arms.

Rach. [*Struggling to get free.*] No! No! Not you! Don't—don't touch me! They'll think—Oh, let me go!

Len. Rachel! Oh, what a hound! What a cur I've been! Rachel! Rachel, forgive me! [*She revives, struggles free from him, and goes off left.*] Sir John, I'm a scoundrel! I daren't face Miss Plugenet, but ask her——

Sir J. [*Turns away from him with an angry gesture.*] Mrs. Wilmore, you knew this! And you lied to me and fooled me!

Mrs. W. What have you done, Len?

Len. Linnell, I beg your pardon. I've behaved like a ——

Lin. That's past! Look up! Look up, my friend!
You've cleared yourself! You've owned your fault!
You're a free man from this hour!

[Shaking hands warmly.]

CURTAIN.

A fortnight passes between Acts III and IV.



ACT IV.

SCENE: *The same as Act III. An afternoon about a fortnight later. Discover MRS. WILMORE looking eagerly off at window. She goes to bell and rings it, then returns to window, and again looks off.*

Enter GOODYER at back.

Mrs. Wilmore.



GOODYER, wasn't that Mr. Lennard who went into the lodge just now?

Good. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. W. With the young lady who——

Good. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. W. Please go across to the lodge and tell him I cannot see him—or the young lady.

Good. Yes, ma'am. [Looking off.] Here is Mr. Lennard, ma'am.

LENNARD enters at back. Exit GOODYER.

Len. Mother!

Mrs. W. No, Lennard! No! I can never feel you're really my son again till you've given up this girl——

Len. That will be "never." But you don't mean it!

Mrs. W. I do. To be talked about all over the county, and "cut" by our old friends! To be turned out of our old home, and thrown back into poverty! That's enough for me to bear, without taking to my heart the cause of it all.

Len. I am the cause of it all.

Mrs. W. No, she is the cause of it all!

Len. No, I. I alone. It was my folly and cowardice. Now I'm trying to repair the mischief I've done.

Mrs. W. By this impossible marriage!

Len. I love her! I've never really loved anybody else. It all came back when she stood there so bravely. Mother, you wouldn't have me behave like a cad and a villain to her a second time?

Mrs. W. It's useless to talk. I can never receive Miss Neve into our family. You must choose between her and me——

Len. Then I choose her.

Mrs. W. So be it. I've to thank your friend Mr. Linnell for this.

Len. Yes, Linnell is our friend. He has seen Sir John Plugenet, and brought him round——

Mrs. W. I don't wish Sir John Plugenet to be brought round. He has behaved infamously in spreading this scandal through the county. We are utterly disgraced and ruined!

Enter VIVEASH and WILMORE at back. WILMORE is pompously self-pitying. LENNARD bows to him, but he barely nods to LENNARD in return.

Vive. Well, how are you?

[*Shaking hands with MRS. WILMORE*

Mrs. W. As you see.

Vive. Glad to see you back home, Lennard.

Wil. Lennard is not at home; except in the sense of being present here for the moment. He is still enjoying the hospitality of his bosom friend Linnell.

Vive. Surely, Wilmore, you won't turn your only son of doors?

Wil. I shall certainly not welcome him here until he has given up his idea of marrying this—a—young person.

Len. I'm sorry, father. Mr. Linnell is to marry Miss Neve and me to-morrow morning in London.

Wil. What?

Mrs. W. [*Heartbroken.*] Lennard! Lennard!

Wil. And pray what happens after that?

Len. Sir John Plugenet has been kind enough to get me a railway appointment in India.

Wil. Indeed!

Len. Through Linnell's influence. Rachel and I leave for India next week. And I'm going to pull myself together, and make a thundering hard try to be a better sort of chap for the future. Mother, you'll help us?

Mrs. W. No, Lennard, no!

Len. I've brought her over from Gilminster. If you won't come to our wedding at least you'll see her, and wish us happiness?

Mrs. W. I can't! I can't!

Wil. Where is this young person?

Len. Across at the lodge.

Wil. In my lodge! On my premises!

Len. Yes, father. I think my future wife is quite good enough company for your gardener! Mother, you'll see her?

Mrs. W. No—no——

Vive. I think you'd better.

Enter GOODYER at back, announcing MR. DAUBENY.

Exit GOODYER.

Daub. Ah, my dear friends! How are you, Mrs. Wilmore? [*Shaking hands with her.*] Enjoying this marvellous autumn weather, I trust?

Mrs. W. Yes.

Daub. That's right! You're looking more charming than ever! [*Nodding to VIVEASH.*] Ah, Viveash! Lennard!

Vive. How are you?

Len. How d'ye do?

[*VIVEASH has whispered to LENNARD. LENNARD goes off, left.*]

Daub. Wilmore, my dear old friend, I do trust you aren't allowing this tiresome little affair of Lennard's to depress your spirits?

Wil. No. I am bearing up wonderfully well on the whole.

Daub. That's right.

Wil. I can safely say that throughout this undeserved affliction I have borne myself like a Christian, and a gentleman——

Daub. I'm sure you have! And that must be a great consolation to you!

Wil. We all have to suffer for the wrongdoings of others——

Daub. We do! We do! Very true! Well, we shall be safely ensconced in the Deanery to-night. I ran over to say "Good-bye." My dear wife would have come, but she has one of her hacking coughs. However, she sent her love—and—sympathy. By the way, Mrs. Wilmore, you didn't answer her note?

Mrs. W. About your dinner party?

Daub. Yes. As Sir John Plugenet is to be there we thought it only kind to you to give you a chance of—avoiding him.

Mrs. W. Have you given Sir John Plugenet the same chance of avoiding us?

Daub. I don't quite follow.

Mrs. W. Mrs. Daubeny suggests we should decline to come to your dinner party.

Daub. No, indeed! Don't put it like that! Such old friends! But being our first dinner party, we're anxious to avoid—any little discord.

Mrs. W. I see! Please tell Mrs. Daubeny we withdraw our acceptance of your kind invitation.

Daub. We must have a little cosy family dinner—just our four selves. Now name your own day.

Mrs. W. Thank you. I cannot fix one at present.

Daub. Well, don't be long about it, there's a dear, amiable lady! Viveash, my dear friend, when you're over at Gilminster, you'll drop in and lunch with us.

Vive. Delighted.

Daub. Do, now. [*Going off, suddenly bethinking himself.*] Wilmore, I hear you're leaving Weybury, which I do hope is not true. But if you are, and if you should be selling your cellar, you might put an old friend in the way of buying what remains of that port—you know that delicious, soft, silky, sixty-eight? Now there's a hint for you, my dear friend! Do take it! Good-bye!

Wil. Good-bye. [MRS. WILMORE *rings bell.*

Daub. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] Don't worry about this affair of Lennard's. It will soon blow over—soon blow over. Good-bye, Viveash, my dear friend.

Vive. Good-bye.

GOODYER *appears at door at back.*

Daub. Good-bye, dear friends. Good-bye.

[*Exit at back, followed by GOODYER.*

Mrs. W. You see! We are to be tabooed! We are to be cut by everybody!

Wil. Yes, I met the new Wesleyan minister yesterday, and instead of bowing respectfully to me, as he ought, he stared up at the front of his new chapel. I'm sure he was chuckling up his sleeve!

Vive. Let's hope he was meditating a lapse into Gothic for his next meeting house.

Wil. You can chaff, Viveash! you're not losing the honourable record of a lifetime, laboriously spent in advancing the highest morality and soundest Churchmanship amongst your neighbours——

Vive. No, but I'm losing the few shekels I'd laboriously scraped together in fostering litigation amongst such of my neighbours as were fools enough to go to law. What's the use of harking back? We're in a very awkward position, and only one man can pull us out—Linnell.

Mrs. W. Linnell!

Vive. Linnell. Of course this business has put Linnell in high favour with Sir John. Now, I'm persuading Linnell that Sir John was very unchristianlike in making a fuss and blackguarding you all over the county. Linnell is persuading Sir John that he was very unchristianlike, and Sir John is beginning to feel that he was very unchristianlike; so I fancy he'll help us out of our hole with the mortgages; especially as your property would be a very good investment for him, and round off the Plugenet estate. But we must get Linnell to pull the strings with Sir John for us.

Mrs. W. I will owe nothing to Mr. Linnell, except my own, and my son's disgrace and ruin.

Enter GOODYER at back.

Good. Miss Plugenet and Mr. Linnell are in the drawing-room, ma'am. They wish to see you alone for a few minutes.

Mrs. W. I will see Miss Plugenet. I cannot receive Mr. Linnell.

Vive. Oh, I think you will. [*To GOODYER.*] All right, Goodyer. We'll come into the drawing-room.

[*Exit GOODYER.*

Vive. [*To MRS. WILMORE.*] Come, old friend! You've lost a great deal, but don't lose your nerves, don't lose your temper, don't lose your hold of the situation. I shall send Linnell to you.

[*Exit at back.*

Wil. Charlotte, I think you might come and help us pull the strings——

Mrs. W. I've pulled all my strings! They've all broken! Please tell Mr. Linnell I will not receive him—and leave me alone.

[*Throwing herself in a chair in despair.*

Wil. [*Looking at her.*] Yes, it's a pretty state of affairs. However, I can honestly say I've acted throughout according to the dictates of my conscience——

Mrs. W. [*Enraged.*] Conscience! Conscience! Conscience! Oh, stamp on it! Stamp on it! What's the use of a conscience like yours, that always works wrong——

Wil. Upon my word! Really, Charlotte! My own wife too!

[*HELEN appears at the door at back, which has been left open.*

Hel. [*Coldly bows.*] I beg pardon——

Wil. Please come in, Miss Plugenet——

HELEN enters.

Hel. [*Entering.*] May I have a few words with Mrs. Wilmore?

Wil. Certainly. I—a—I—a——

[*HELEN takes no notice of him. He pompously pulls himself together and exit at back.*

Hel. [*Pale, subdued.*] I couldn't leave Weybury without saying "Good-bye" to you.

Mrs. W. Thank you. It's kind of you.

Hel. Your son is not at home to-day——

Mrs. W. Yes, Lennard is at the lodge.

Hel. Then I mustn't stay. Good-bye.

Mrs. W. Good-bye, dear. Oh, Helen, I'm so sorry! [*The two women cry together.*] And your heart is broken too!

Hel. No, not quite. Mr. Linnell has been so kind.

Mrs. W. Mr. Linnell!

Hel. He has taught me to bear it, and to grow strong and better by it. I shall have a higher life, if not a happier life. A high life can't be a happy life, can it? I'm going to work with Mr. Linnell in London.

Mrs. W. In London?

Hel. I've managed to get him appointed to the vicarage of St. James's, Shadwell. It's a poor living, but it's just what he wished, and what I wish. We are leaving to-night. He wants to see you. He's waiting in the next room.

Mrs. W. I can't see him. The man who has brought me to the dust! I can't!

Hel. Good-bye then.

Mrs. W. Good-bye. Oh, Helen, it's all over! All my wishes! All my life! I'm dead! No, worse than that! I'm living, with nothing to live for! [*Wiping away her tears.*] This won't do. Good-bye!

Hel. Good-bye.

They are embracing when the door at back opens, and RACHEL enters, shown in and followed by LENNARD. RACHEL comes down a few steps. MRS. WILMORE and HELEN then disengage themselves, and RACHEL and HELEN recognize each other. HELEN utters a little cry, and goes to the door at back.

Len. [*Showing great shame.*] I beg pardon. I didn't know—— [*He is going off.*

Hel. No, please stay. I'm going. [*He stands deeply ashamed. HELEN goes towards door, then stops, looks at RACHEL a moment, goes to her.*] I hope you will be very happy! [*Kisses RACHEL. Exit at back.*

Len. Mother, we're leaving England in a few days. Haven't you a word to say to her?

Mrs. W. [*To RACHEL, who has stood apart, ashamed.*] Yes. Please come to me. [*RACHEL goes to her.*] I don't wish to speak unkindly, but, through you, Lennard's career has been destroyed for the time——

Rach. Oh, don't say that!

Mrs. W. I must. My son was in a great position. He might have hoped for any honours—the highest—he had a splendid future. To-day he's a disgraced pauper—through you!

Len. Mother! Mother! Rachel, come away with me.

Mrs. W. No, Lennard, please let her hear me! [*To*

RACHEL.] I'm not reproaching you. It's done. But now you're going to do him a further injury——

Rach. No! No!

Mrs. W. Yes! If you leave him, and go out of his life, this disgrace will pass away and be forgotten. We have some influential friends in London. In a few years he will redeem his mistake, and make a good marriage. Won't you give him a chance? Haven't you done him harm enough?

Rach. Oh, what am I to do?

Len. Come away with me! Mother, I'll never give her up now.

Mrs. W. Then I hope she'll have the good sense and the good feeling to give you up.

Len. Rachel!

Mrs. W. Keep silence, Lennard, if you please, and let me save you from this last dishonour. What do you say?

Rach. I love him so much! I can't give him up now! You won't ask me! I've promised Mr. Linnell! [LINNELL *appears at door.*] Ah, tell me! Must I give Lennard up? Is it for his good? Tell me I ought, and I'll try to do it, even now!

Mrs. W. Mr. Linnell, please keep away from us now! I won't have you interfere in this. [To RACHEL.] You've heard what I said! Don't listen to him.

Lin. She will listen to me. And you will listen to me.

Mrs. W. I won't! Go, please! [*Pointing.*] The door! The door!

Lin. [To LENNARD.] Miss Neve, Lennard, please leave me a few minutes with Mrs. Wilmore.

[*Motioning them to door, left.*]

Mrs. W. No! No!

Lin. If you please, Lennard!

Len. Rachel——

[*Taking her off, left.*]

Mrs. W. Is it always to be so? Will you always come in my way?

Lin. Always! till you're in the right way.

Mrs. W. I won't hear you!

Lin. Ah, but you will!

Mrs. W. No! No! You've broken up my home, you've defeated all my hopes, you've ruined my son, you're parting me from him now when I love and need him most, you're sending him away to India to die, perhaps, out there—I may never see him again. You've done all this! Well, you've done it! So be satisfied with your work, and let me be!

Lin. My work isn't finished —

Mrs. W. Not finished?! Pray, what more have you to do?

Lin. To open your eyes! To make you see what you would have done! Think of it! And you asked me, God's minister, to wink at your foul trick and help you—help you prepare a long life of treachery and distrust for your son and his bride! Look at it! Where is your conscience? Where is your eyesight? Ah, but you wouldn't have done it! Very shame would have stopped you——

Mrs. W. You have stopped me! So be content.

Lin. No, not till you own your son is doing right.

Mrs. W. To marry that girl?

Lin. Yes! They love each other. Their future will be all the more secure from their bitter remembrance of the past. They'll work out their repentance in a great love. He'll build his house on the true love of man and wife. It will stand. His hopes, his honour, his safety, his duty, his happiness,—all lie with her. Can't you see that?

Mrs. W. I can see nothing, except that I'm to lose Lennard.

Lin. No. [*Takes out a letter.*] Please read that.

[*Gives it to her.*]

Mrs. W. From Sir John Plugenet?

[*She opens and reads the letter.*]

Lin. He feels sorry he made this story public. I've

been with him and his lawyer all this morning. He proposes to take over all your mortgages, and leave you in possession here on easy terms.

Mrs. W. But we shall owe everything to Sir John Plugenet! [*Reading on.*] No! Worse than that! He says, "In conclusion, I may tell you that I am making this arrangement purely on the persuasion of Mr. Linnell. If it should secure your future well-being and happiness, you will owe it to him——" I can't! I can't! To owe everything to you!

Lin. Don't think of me as your creditor. Think of me as your servant, God's servant, and therefore your servant, sent to hold a light to your path, and smooth it where it's rough and thorny. Won't you let me do that? Won't you understand that I'm your servant and your friend? Won't you? [*Holding out his hand.*]

Mrs. W. [*Giving her hand.*] I'll try. But Lennard—Lennard is going from me.

Lin. Go with him. A friend has given me money for a passage to India, and a year's stay there——

Mrs. W. A friend! Helen Plugenet!

Lin. She has forgiven. You will forgive, too? Come to their marriage to-morrow, and go out to India with them. If you refuse, he will still make her his wife. You can't hinder that. Then you will remember all your life that you parted from him in anger. If, as you said, he should die out there——

Mrs. W. Bring them in! Bring them in!

LINNELL goes to door, left, beckons to RACHEL and LENNARD, who enter.

Mrs. W. [*To LINNELL.*] You've broken my heart! [*To RACHEL.*] Come to me, my dear.

[*The two women embrace in tears.*]

Lin. [*To LENNARD.*] Your mother is going to your marriage to-morrow, and to India with you——

Len. Mother, is that so?

[MRS. WILMORE *nods and smiles.*

Lin. Now my work in Weybury is finished! Tomorrow all your lives begin anew!

CURTAIN.



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